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CHRISTIAN COURIER  
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# CHRISTIAN COURIER

Theme issue: Christian education

## Do Christian schools make a difference?

**Harro Van Brummelen**

Many Christian school graduates become successful in the world of work. Many also set out to serve God in their families and communities. Therefore Christian school principals can often tell stories about graduates who make significant God-glorifying contributions through their insights or efforts.

However, principals in public schools may tell similar stories. So an important question for Christians is whether human and financial investment in Christian schools pays off. Do Christian schools really make a difference in the lives of their students? Five or 15 years after they have left school, how do their lives compare with those of students from Christian families who attended public schools?

Until now, we had little evidence one way or the other. However, two years ago the Hamilton-based Cardus Foundation launched a major research study to provide some answers to this question. It funded a major continent-wide survey headed by David Sikkink of the University of Notre Dame, as well as four smaller studies that complemented the large investigation. The initial results of these studies were released in August.

One question that should be asked about such a study is whether the results just reflect that typical parents who send their children to Christian schools are more serious about their faith. In this study, therefore, the researchers have assessed the effects of the school itself, removing the effects of family background.

### Encouraging results

So, what were the results of the study?

First of all, graduates of (Protestant) Christian schools report that their high school prepared them for a vibrant religious life. They attend church services more frequently. They are more prone to believe that the Bible is infallible and that morality is based on absolute standards. They are less likely to doubt the central tenets of the

**The Cardus study is the first major research report on the effectiveness of Christian schools.**

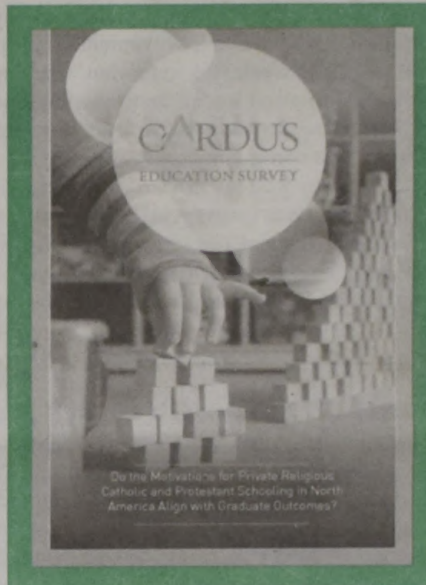
Christian faith. They pray as well as read the Bible more frequently.

Christian school graduates also view life more positively. They have a constructive sense of direction and feel confident about dealing with life's problems. They seek jobs in which they can fulfil their religious calling. They are unusually grateful for whatever income and possessions they have. They are far more generous in donations to church and other religious causes — despite having a lower household income. Moreover, they continue to be much more involved in mission as well as relief and development trips.

All in all, Christian schools have an important positive influence on the faith and mind-set of their students. Even 10 or 20 years later, their graduates support not only their churches but also the stability of their communities.

With respect to family life, Christian school graduates tend to marry earlier, have more children, and divorce less frequently. However, on such issues

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## The times, they are a-changin': reflections on Christian education over time

**Christina Belcher**

When Bob Dylan penned "the times, they are a-changin'" years ago, he likely did not plan to equate it in any way with Christian Education. However, time does bring change to persons, places and things. By many counts, Christian Schooling indeed finds itself changing. These changes are informed by contentions about what defines Christian schooling in a global age, what internal and external changes may affect it, and what "ends" it aims to achieve. Culture frames them all.

Up until the 1960s faith was considered to be valuable to the kind of citizens schooling produced. I can relate to the Dylan lyric because I began my teaching career



Bob Dylan wasn't referring to Christian education when he wrote "the times they are a-changin'," but the sentiment applies.

as a baby boomer in the 1970s, when schooling was undergoing the same "shifts" that we find ourselves, as educators, in now. The old guard was retiring, the new guard was easing in and definitions of what good "schooling" should look like were both publically and privately rampant. In Christian schools,

there was specific intent to keep at the forefront and to make the Christian faith robust in learning. At the same time, pedagogy was changing, and some of the younger teachers were engaging the world in "troubling ways" — using media in classrooms, talking about computer and movie resources and generally adding to the basics of Christian schooling in areas beyond the pen, paper, blank line masters (I, for one, was glad to see those go!) and the familiar chalkface. Baby boomers began teaching in Christian schools knowing that Christian faith was to be central, but pedagogy could be changed. They had grand hope for the future, and knew that due to a "knee jerk" reaction to some unloved aspects of mandated new public curriculum (sex education, for example) that Christian schools

would certainly grow "as a better option."

### So things were good, right? Wrong.

Despite all the activity around Christian schooling and the availability of teaching jobs looking good, one key area was underdeveloped. Christian educators knew what they were supposed to do (plan and process), but not necessarily what to do for. The ideal was to engage the world with a Christian worldview and embody faith, but to avoid becoming a completely separate sector of it. Sometimes this was difficult for the teacher, because teachers in Christian schools were not all educated in Christian institutions. Some were appointed on letters

See *Reflections* on page 2



## News

Schools *continued*

family background appears to have a much more pronounced influence than the school.

## Some concerns

While these results support the value of Christian schools, the survey also raises some concerns. The proportion of Protestant Christian school graduates getting a university degree is about the same as that of public school graduates – but much less than that of Catholic school graduates. Overall Protestant school graduates attend prestigious universities much less often, likely in part because they had less opportunity to take advanced placement courses. The study therefore suggests that Protestant Christian schools need to put more emphasis on intellectual development while continuing to highlight faith commitment and community engagement and involvement.

Further, Christian school graduates tend to conform to the status quo rather than take risks. They show respect for authority, but seem to interact less with experiences that can affect culture. For instance, they show little interest in political dialogue and involvement. Their participation in the arts is also weak. It is somewhat worrying that Christian schools do not appear to be preparing students for areas of life where they could give leadership that engages and shapes their communities.

## Cultural awareness and engagement

To complement the large study, Robert Koole and I conducted interviews with principals, teachers and grade 12 students in 18 Alberta, British Columbia and Washington State Christian schools. We asked them how their schools encouraged awareness of and involvement in culture.

Reflections *continued*

of permission, some spoke a needed second language – but they were united in that they all attended a Christian church. Faith based learning was not always balanced with academic excellence. Yet as society became more technologically connected this tended to even out somewhat, and the academic dip in the 1960-1970 era began to correct.

## Christian schooling present

Today, to quote another musician, Leonard Cohen, “the blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold” and Christian educators have different challenges to meet. In the 1970s, the relational aspects of schooling were undeniably valued and virtually uninterrupted in the classroom. In 2011, cell phones buzz, computer technology is prevalent and preparation time plus “paper work” (virtual, online or traditional) has extended exponentially. If the job of Christian education is to engage the world, we have the world engaging us at a rapid pace. Now teachers are not making decisions as to whether Johnny has faith as much as to what faith Johnny has. Teachers are not as concerned about engaging new pedagogies as containing them and using them appropriately. Teachers are not as concerned about what they may do after school hours (in the 1970s, we were specifically told what we could and could not do by our superiors!). In fact, teachers are concerned about having any after school hours left to engage in other activities as technology renders them almost continuously available. Instead of marking “in class” many mark online after class is over, moving their preparation time late into the evening.

## New teachers today

The schooling parents themselves knew as children is not the schooling children know now. Christian schools need to consider striving for a balance between the relationship and social skill aspects of true education and the time needed for the structural demands and new inventions of “schooling.” Teachers need a distinctively Christian “system world”

All principals, almost all teachers and students in all but three schools held that their schools helped students to make constructive and significant differences in culture. The students were generally well aware of current events and issues. They discussed such issues in social studies, religious studies, English, media studies and, sometimes, science. Often, however, the focus was more on ethical aspects than on underlying causes of situations.

Most schools offered learning activities to enhance student cultural awareness and expand their involvement in society. However, only a minority of schools had planned programs that systematically set out to link academic learning with the world outside of school. In other words, what was done depended a great deal on the initiative of individual teachers.

What pleasantly surprised us was the amount of community and overseas service activities in most schools. Students were involved, for instance, in soup kitchens, support for single mothers and troubled teens, and environmental initiatives. The thrust of overseas “mission” trips had often gone beyond evangelism to cultural understanding and appreciation.

We found that Christian schools did generally make students aware of cultural issues, and involved them in meaningful service activities. As a result, a surprising number of students wanted to become involved in addressing local and global issues in their future careers (for instance, humanitarian work; striving for world-wide human rights; and making marketing approaches more responsible).

## Rhetoric and reality

Many principals and teachers saw the necessity for expanding their school’s cultural awareness and engagement

activities. Yet, we found, the rhetoric of the schools often oversold and under-delivered. Christian schools need to moderate their world-changing claims. They must define, develop and implement more consistent and more realistic ways in which they prepare their students to be faithful, discerning and creative participants in society and culture.

Christian schools, of course, face a dilemma. Preparing students well for post-secondary education requires a focus on generally expected standards. Thus the curriculum of Christian schools is often tied closely to the content of government guidelines. Yet one of the Cardus research studies did show an example of a school that manages to combine high intellectual rigour with sound and extensive cultural awareness and engagement that focuses on justice and compassion.

Do Christian schools make a positive difference in the lives of their students? The Cardus research study shows quite conclusively that, yes, they do. But, at the same time, the schools need to develop and implement a bolder yet more focused vision, one that encompasses both an integral approach to intellectual development and a preparation for meaningful cultural engagement.

See [carduseducationsurvey.com](http://carduseducationsurvey.com) for a detailed overview of the Cardus study, including discussion outlines for teachers and parents.

Harro Van Brummelen is Professor Emeritus and former Dean of the School of Education at Trinity Western University in Langley, B.C. He is currently the Executive Director of Christian Studies International, an organization that places Christian professors in overseas universities where there is little Christian influence.



Education has changed a lot over the years. Teachers today face new challenges, but even greater opportunities.

model, an institutional structure that faithfully teaches both what it means to be human in a global world as a Christian and what it means to use technology wisely.

New teachers in Christian Schools today face new challenges, and even greater opportunity. Some of this opportunity stems from being part of a professional body. One challenge new teachers face is finding a gracious way to close the gap between how “schooling” is actually done and how teachers are taught. Many teachers enter Christian schools and simply become like their colleagues rather than bringing in new ideas and striving to be the best teacher ever based on the Christian education they received prior to graduation. Conformity is easy. Redeeming what is missing, or trying something new, is not. Christian schools also struggle with budgets, class sizes, technological interventions and reports. But this is not why teachers get into teaching. For Christian educators, new teachers worry about being able to get a job. That is not new. Teachers who want to teach in Christian Schools can usually find a job if they are able and willing to go to the job rather than state where they want the job to be. So what is the real challenge for Christian teachers and Christian schools today?

## Christian schooling future

Will Christian schools bridge the old and new when many wise and seasoned teachers retire and new teachers replace

them? This is a key problem, almost a hidden one in Christian institutions. Christian schools are not, and need not be, “lone ranger” institutions. Christian schools

know community relationships are important in thriving communities of faith. New teachers and retiring teachers need to have a goal to become part of the transition process by being paired in an appropriate mentor/mentee relationship. Living in an age of individuality, we are losing the wealth that mentoring brings. Exceptional teachers in Christian Schools need to partner with Christian Educational providers and work with new teachers, both in practicum situations and when newly hired, to provide a sense of place where faith in Christ can be discussed across the areas of 1) personal faith development and how it links to teaching and learning; 2) institutional, personal and professional “life” goals; 3) projects that impact neighbourhoods and encourage global awareness; 4) mentor/mentee discussions on the priorities of a Christian Education and worldview in and beyond the classroom; and 5) future ideas for change.

While Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen sang of change and rapid social decline, teachers entering Christian schools have a song of hope. They love what they do. They love children. There is a wonderful opportunity open for them. Seize the day.

Christina Belcher is an Associate Professor of Education at Redeemer University College.

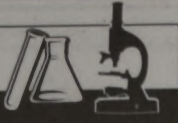




## News

## From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom



At a recent Board and Senate dinner at Wilfrid Laurier University, I had the opportunity to listen to Bob Rae, WLU's former chancellor, and Rob Prichard, a former president of the University of Toronto. Rae declared that one of the most, if not *the* most, important tasks of government is to educate our youth, particularly at the post-secondary level. We as a nation need to be trained to face the challenges presented by our world. Prichard emphasized the same point: education should be a primary concern for our governments to prepare us to face the future.

If this is true for our nation, it is doubly true for the Christian community. If Christians are to provide prophetic voices and action in our world, we need to be properly trained. I am glad that at the September meeting of Classis Huron (a geographical grouping of Christian Reformed congregations), three reports stressed the importance of Christian education and Christian ministry at educational institutions.

Barb Ferrier, the executive director of the Canadian Christian Education Foundation, talked about CCEF's development of Christian materials for Christian schools. After thanking the churches for over 35 years of support and over \$2.5 million raised, Ferrier spoke passionately about the critical need for Christian materials to support the very dedicated teachers in Christian schools. She pointed out that because our commitment to our Lord must undergird all our education, our children need books, resources and now electronic materials shaped by a Reformed worldview.

Ferrier's presentation was followed by a report and greeting from Dr. Hubert Krygsman, the president of Redeemer University College. He noted with great appreciation that in the past year contributions from churches in Classis Huron have increased, a welcome endorsement of

## Christian education, universities and classis

Redeemer's work of providing an undergraduate education to over 900 students this year. He spoke of the joys and challenges of maintaining a university faithful to the call of Christ to serve him in all areas of our lives.

The third education-oriented report was my own: I attended Classis to present a report on behalf of the Waterloo Campus Ministry Committee, which supervises the work of Rev. Brian Bork at University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier University. Bork's work, as well as that of James VanderBerg at University of Guelph, is supported by the Classis and CRC's Home Missions. Similar denominational support is offered to campus ministers at many other public universities across Canada and the U.S. While sharing with Classis the exciting and important work happening in Waterloo, I expressed my deep appreciation as a faculty member at WLU, along with thanks from many students, for their more than 30 years of support maintaining this ministry and presence. Many students who now are part of the CRC and of many other churches have been guided on their Christian walk, or led to our Lord and Saviour, by the ongoing work of our campus ministers.

Campus ministry work is different from the work of educators at Christian schools and providing textbooks, but all such work participates in our Lord's call to bring his gospel to the world around us. The ministries Ferrier, Krygsman and I reported on are linked in many ways, part of a larger education-oriented ministry shared by our Reformed Christian community in North America. One explicit example of such links is that I was able to thank Dr. Krygsman on behalf of the Waterloo Campus Ministry Committee for the many Redeemer professors who have provided spiritual and academic food at our Soup and Speaker student events, opportunities for students to grapple



Rev. Brian Bork and some of the students involved in the Campus Ministry programs at the University of Waterloo.

with Christian perspectives in various academic disciplines.

We may be Canadians, but we are also part of the kingdom of our Lord. Thus it is with extreme gratitude and respect that I look back to all the ways that our parents have sacrificed to give us such a rich Christian educational heritage. We have a presence at all levels of education from kindergarten to graduate schools. We have strong Christian educational institutions and a significant presence in the public educational system. We encourage students of all ages to bring their beliefs to bear not only on salvation matters but also on the whole person and on all aspects of creation. This blessing from our parents is something we should celebrate, embrace and take forward into the 21st century and till our Lord returns.

Rudy Eikelboom ([reikelboom@wlu.ca](mailto:reikelboom@wlu.ca)), who has been blessed by Rev. Bork's ministry, is a member of Waterloo CRC and Chair of the Psychology Department at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont.

## Fired by a Christian school?

Peter Van Huizen

It happens. Every year there seems to be a teacher or more who lose their job at a Christian School. It probably has happened in a Christian school in your community over the years. This no longer comes as a surprise to many of us who love our Christian Schools, but it does tug at our hearts if the termination seems unjust.



The entire community is hurt when Christian school teachers are fired for unclear or unjust reasons.

When the reasons for termination are understood, the teacher and the community generally accept the verdict. Declining enrolment, paring a deficit budget and confronting unacceptable teacher performance are probably the most frequent motivations for termination. Most contracts have protocol provisions for layoff or termination.

When the reasons for termination are not understood and a teacher loses his or her job, questions are raised. If an injustice is perceived in the termination, the whole school community feels terrible and the teaching community feels vulnerable.

My experience after 35 years in Christian education has been that Christian school communities have erred generously on the side of compassion for a teacher with performance issues. On balance, the treatment of our teachers has been very good. In some cases this grace has had the unintended consequence of tolerating incompetent teaching.

However, every year there seem to be those cases where a

school board or administrator by-passes understood protocols and uses a "without cause" provision to terminate someone's contract. The idea is that if we "buy him or her out" by paying a one month salary for every year worked, then the end justifies the means. The "end result" can be rationalized by getting rid of an expensive teacher, a mediocre teacher or an annoying personality.

The relationship between a school society and its teachers is based on trust. For trust to grow, transparency is vital to how the board and principal deal with their staff. The contract plays an important role in defining the rules of the employer-employee relationship when trouble surfaces. The principal has the very important job of ensuring that the teacher knows (in writing) if there are problems and that a plan of action is in place to improve the situation.

Most Christian school teachers do not have a union to represent them. In B.C. the Christian Teacher Association advocates for teachers and provides professional "facilitation services" in the event of a contractual conflict. School Boards and Administrators that by-pass mediation services and contractual protocols when termination is being considered give all Christian Schools a black eye and make the union an attractive option.

Schools exist first of all for students, but teachers are a close second. Termination will always be an option for boards and principals, but how they use that authority can bring blessing or grief. Pray that our Christian schools model quality board-principal-teacher relationships so that God is honoured!



Peter Van Huizen is the Executive Director of the Christian Teachers Association of B.C. He has been a teacher and administrator in Ont. and B.C. for 40 years.

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## Editorials

## Widening our perspective on Christian schools



Gary Van Arragon

Christian schools are probably most often imagined as being of interest to Christian families, as one of the ways in which the Christian faith of young people can be nurtured and strengthened. Within this framework there is a sense that Christian schools serve a narrow sector of society, and that the main function of these schools is to act as a partner with Christian families and Christian churches in keeping Christian youth within the Christian community and training them to serve there.

There is, of course, a great deal of validity to this understanding of the work of Christian schools, and there is also considerable evidence, anecdotal and otherwise, that suggests that Christian schools can be very effective in meeting this goal. Christian schools can be (and often are) places where the gospel story is told and where students are invited to find their place, personally and vocationally, within that story.

If Christian schools are seen in this way, however, there is ample reason for the public at large to characterize these schools as elitist institutions with interest in serving only the private interests of a small select (Christian) group of people. That perception was certainly strengthened in the province of Ontario during the election of 2007, in which a proposal to extend public funding to faith-based schools became a major point of contention. What was really at issue in this debate was the place of faith, however defined, in describing the character and role of institutions that were seen as having a broad public function.

If faith is essentially a private matter, as was proposed by many in that election campaign, then the province's schools should be public places which serve to develop a common public purpose within a unifying civic spirit. In the interests of social unity, all students should attend the same school system and be taught the same set of beliefs and values. If Christian schools existed at all, they should be narrowly defined as serving only a small sector of the public, namely the Christian families who chose to access such schools as a way of strengthening their children's faith and ensuring their participation in the Christian community. Often faith communities effectively accept this definition of their schools by restrictive admission and membership policies, and with financing structures that exclude students and families who do not meet specific theological and economic requirements.

## A broader understanding

However, if the story of the Gospel, which undergirds the work of Christian schools, offers a message of hope to ALL people, it is perhaps time to position Christian schools as major contributors to the public good rather than as institutions which serve the interests of specific, often denominational, communities. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not, and was never intended to be, the exclusive property of a select group of people. Rather, it is good news for all people and the entire world. All people live by a faith story, whether that be the Christian story, the Muslim story, the story of secular capitalism or some other story which enables its adherents to make sense of the world and their place in it. Especially in a world where many of the stories that compete with the Christian story are losing their appeal and vitality, the story out of which Christians live can offer hope and direction in a world that seems increasingly chaotic and confused.

Christian schools can be places where students become aware of the spiritual roots of the cultural, moral and economic crises that we face and can develop ways in which they can be a healing presence in our world. Christian schools can be important contributors to the development of culturally astute leaders who can, with profound humility and care, suggest to our communities that the Gospel story offers a better way for understanding ourselves and our world. These leaders

can be people, who like the sons of Issachar described in 1 Chronicles 12: 32 "understand the times and knew what Israel should do." They, in strategic alliances with other like-minded people of faith, can bring the Gospel's definitions of peace, justice and reconciliation into the ways they live and serve in their families and churches, and also into their wider communities, work places, the political process, the arts and every other area of culture. The Gospel's message of shalom is applicable in every area of life and not only in the private areas. In that way, Christian education can be seen as a gift to the world and a contributor to the public good.

*Gary VanArragon served for many years as a teacher and administrator in Christian schools in Ont. Since his retirement he works as an independent consultant, focussing mainly on secondary school issues.*

## Here and now



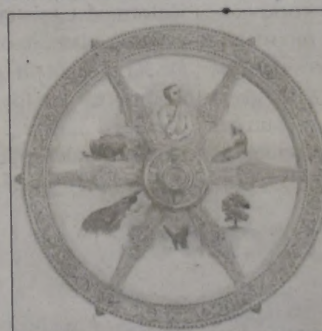
Christina de Jong

On a Thursday in August the sun shone high in the sky and the wind blew me to work and home again. The day had been productive, yet I felt off-centre. These days my answer to feeling off-centre is to run. I have come to love a route that takes me through the quiet, tree-lined streets of my neighbourhood. On this Thursday I ran through the field behind the elementary school the kids went to, the lake a broad stroke of blue to the south of me, the grass green beneath me.

Once across the field I saw, in my peripheral vision, a small East Indian man dressed in white. He spoke to me, but I couldn't hear with ear buds in my ears. I stopped and took an ear bud out. "Pardon me?" I said. "You must not over do it!" he said. "I see you," he said, jabbing a finger in the air in several directions, "here, there, everywhere."

Our conversation evolved. I lived in India 13 years ago, and one of my closest friends is Indian. And this elderly man, with his joyful expression, reminded me of her 80 year-old father. I learned that my new acquaintance was from Sri Lanka, that he had taken a degree in English from the University of Madras and taught English at a university in Nigeria. He recited his own poetry, and Shakespeare, with great animation. Then he said to me: "You must not be lopsided. You must be balanced. Make priorities carefully."

Did he know somehow I was feeling all too lopsided that day? I welcomed his words. I felt expansive and free; the evening light was watery and beautiful. The professor was so pleased to have met me. We agreed to meet for tea. There must be more I can learn from this wise and joyful gentleman. Who cares that I am a Christian and he is a Hindu? There is inherent value in all religions, after all. Isn't there? I have always thought so.



*Hindus believe that after death our souls move on to another body.*

One Sunday afternoon soon after this encounter we met for tea. The professor was waiting and seemed intent on speaking to me at length; he even had notes prepared. A teacher just looking for a student, I thought. Fine: I have so much to learn! But I was to hear no more talk of "you must be balanced" that day. Rather, the professor was determined that I should know who I was in my past life; not only did he know this, he said, but he had evidence. The story unfolded. Hearing it was like someone turned off the lights; I felt myself at the edge of a dark abyss, trapped in someone else's reality, someone else's experience, someone else's time. My present, my current being, my future was of no significance; I was a chess piece in a game I knew nothing of, fated to death not just once but time and time again, fated to come back in another life again and again, with a view to working off the negative karma of all my previous lives.

Finally there was a pause. "Do you believe me?" the professor said. I looked him straight in the eye and said with a depth of conviction I have never felt so strongly before, "No." My heart wrapped around my answer. NO! I have but one life, in the here and now, and I have but one home to go to at the end of this life, and in that home I will still and forever be me, and the one who is waiting for me is my Father and the God of all.

I don't know how to pit the tenants of Christianity against Hinduism, an ancient religion which dates back to 1700-1100 BCE. I don't know enough about Hinduism. I confess I've also been leery of saying to anyone that Christianity is the "right" religion. Tenets of Eastern religions like Buddhism and Taoism often ring true for me. A Muslim neighbour in India became like a sister to me and we would often pray for each other through the years. The professor proclaimed the day of our tea that there is only one religion, but 100 versions. When he said this I had nodded. "That sounds good," I thought. But in those moments of hearing just one of my past lives described to me in great detail, I knew for certain that what the professor believed and what I believed put us on completely different pages. For him there would be no comfort to be found in the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism, which, for the first time in a long time, flooded through me:

That I am not my own,  
but belong –  
body and soul,  
in life and in death –  
to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

## Christian Courier

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## News/Letter

## What Christian education means

We asked several grade 12 students at London District Christian Secondary School in London, Ont. to reflect on what Christian education means to them. Their thoughtful answers were gathered and compiled by Paul Buma, a teacher and senior guidance counsellor at LDCSS, and appear in various places throughout this issue.

## What Christian education means to Esther Schuurman



I love my school. I love my teachers, my classes, learning, extracurricular activities; all of it. Now, I know I am a pretty enthusiastic person, but hear me out. My teachers teach every class with passion. They love what they are teaching and that helps us love what we are learning. They offer their perspective – how they see God in their subject – every class. They care about their students. They offer extra help before tests. They encourage class discussions and value their students' opinions. All the extracurricular activities place God first. We pray before every sports game. Playing fairly,

being a good team member and good sportsmanship are most important. We sing "To God Be the Glory" before each play performance.

But the thing I love most about my school is what a tight-knit community we are. It's not a big school, compared to most public high schools, and can't offer the huge range of programs they can. But I think the community we have is much more important. The years I have been in high school have been tough ones. We have seen the passing of three students' parents, and one student. The assemblies, prayers and memorial services have strengthened us as a community. To have friends and people around you who support you through the toughest times, who believe what you believe and who openly talk about faith and doubts is priceless. As one of my friends said as I was writing this, "Christian education is not so much about the learning, but about the community."

## What Christian education means to Alex Gluch



The primary purpose of Christian education is to allow children and teenagers, such as myself, to be given a firm foundation upon the Word of God. This is rooted in Proverbs 22:6, which states: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." To start children off right is only possible by basing their entire lives in the truth. This protects us when we are malleable in our youth, and when we are mature we will hold firm to the truth that is in the core of who we are.

It is key that when we are young we are shielded from the negative influences of the world, because when we are young we develop our sense of morality and decide what we think of as normal. Because of this, Christian education is a wise choice until young people are no longer as greatly influenced by those around us.

I believe that it is important to offer consistency to a child. In this way, Christian schools excel because everything orbits around the Bible. This consistency, when coupled with love and care, will cause a child to stop needing affirmation from his or her peers. Since that child is more stable and confident, he or she will naturally be a leader when he or she goes out into the world.

The obvious downside to protection is that it is a form of isolation. However, I believe the trade-off to be advantageous because in the end, we still end up in the world showing Jesus but are better equipped to be the person that people look up to. I pray that someday people will look up to me and see right past me to my Father in heaven. In that way I will know that Christian education has been successful and that I am living in a way that pleases God.

## Here and now *continued*

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil.

He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven:

in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. ✠

*Christina de Jong lives in Toronto, Ontario with her two children and her dog, Hazel. She works as Web and eCommunications Specialist for CRWRC and is also a core member of Contrary Company.*

## What Christian education means to Kevin Rowaan



When thinking about the difference Christian education makes, many ideas popped into my head. Many of them are the typical things people say, like we mix faith and studies so God is central in everything, we have worship times, devotions and the opportunity to talk about spiritual questions, problems or ideas freely. I wanted to dig deeper though. I didn't want to give what I thought would be the correct answer; instead I wanted to be honest about the actual difference Christian education makes. But the more I thought about it, the more I came back to those same answers.

In all we do, God is present. We start our mornings by talking to him and discussing different aspects of what it may mean to be a Christian and live a Christian life. In our studies, no matter if it is math, English, gym, or drama, we are always challenged to discover a different aspect of God and his creation. When we play sports or do other extracurricular activities, we are always reminded that we are representing not only ourselves and our school, but also our Lord. I find that this gives a deeper meaning to what it means to be sportsmanlike; knowing that no matter how competitive or immersed in a game I may become, that I still must maintain self-control and respect others. In all these ways, Christian education helps me to always remember and be conscious of the presence of my Lord and that living for him is a 24/7 deal, not only a Sunday morning thing.

Another big difference Christian education makes is the community it brings. Everyone seems to know everyone else, and seems to always be free to talk if need be. Also whenever something monumental happens, like if someone loses a family member, becomes seriously injured or if a natural disaster occurs, we come together for an assembly and bring our concerns before God.

Everything said and done, I think the biggest difference Christian education makes is that it is not only mentally educational, but it also is an environment where you can grow spiritually and bond with others who share your beliefs and values. Because of that, I wouldn't want to be in any other system.

## Evolution, but not that kind

Thanks to John Suk for writing his thoughts about evolution (CC Aug. 8, 2011). Yes, there is evolution in the sense of evolving, growing out of and improving, such as the advancement from Alexander Graham Bell's telephone to the wireless phones of today. But evolution didn't occur in Darwin's way of thinking.

Evolution is also evident in medical technology. When my grandpa passed away at the age of 53 on May 8, 1929 (his 25th wedding anniversary) because of a bleeding ulcer, they did not know what to do. Years later on Dec. 12, 2006 our youngest son was suffering from liver sickness and had an operation that gave him part of his sister's liver. He is now able to do his work in nursing. This couldn't have happened in 1929, and *that* is evolution. But again, not in the "big bang" sense.

There would have been no airplane without the internal combustion engine, no telephone without electricity, no way of using uranium to generate energy without the splitting of atoms. All of these possibilities were given in creation for humans to find out. One person finds one step, the next person another step. We have to give honour where honour is due, both to people for their discoveries and to the Lord God as the giver of these possibilities.

One more observation: with the creation story, we often think about creation happening over six days and then the fall happening within a month or so. Maybe we should consider a longer time span, for we are given indication that there was a time of struggle, not a good time, and longer than just one week.

Jan Jansma  
Port Alberni, B.C.

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## News

## Windsor: Want to buy a church or three? It'll cost you a dollar

Marian Van Til, with files from Catholic Culture and the Windsor Star

WINDSOR, Ont. — A Roman Catholic diocese is offering to sell three closed parishes in Windsor for one dollar. That's three-for-a-dollar, not one dollar each. As the *Windsor Star* put it in reporting the story, "It sounds like a deal you could get at an old-fashioned candy store."

Not only is the price outrageously low, but each of the churches involved — Our Lady of the Rosary, Annunciation and St. Joachim — has been designated a heritage site under the Ontario Heritage Act.

That designation somewhat limits how each church building can be used by any future owner or owners. In addition, the Diocese of London has drawn up "restricted covenants" on the deeds which stipulate that future use of the church buildings cannot be contrary to Roman Catholic teachings. So anyone with ideas of turning a church into a strip club, a porn theatre or offices for doctors who perform abortions had better look elsewhere for real estate bargains.

Each of the church buildings has interesting and beautiful architectural



qualities, but they also need repairs. That is particularly true of Our Lady of the Rosary. The city of Windsor says the church needs immediate repairs estimated at \$220,000, and as much as \$1.8 million more might need to be spent in the next decade.

The number of Catholic parishes in the Diocese of London, where the three Windsor parishes are located, has fallen from 171 in 1975 to 120 today. The Sunday Mass attendance rate is only 14 percent of those in the diocese who say they are Catholics. ✕

## Saudi police detain soccer player for showing tattoo of Christ

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (CNA) — Saudi Arabia's religious police detained a Colombian soccer player at a shopping mall earlier this month for not covering up an image of Jesus tattooed on his shoulder.

Juan Pablo Piño, 24, who plays with the Al Nasr Soccer Club in Saudi Arabia, was wearing a sleeveless shirt while out with his pregnant wife at a mall in the capital city of Riyadh. Locals who saw the tattoo began insulting him. Then officers from the Police Force for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice detained the couple. The local paper *Sharq* reported that officers escorted the pair to a car and then waited for Al Nasr club officials to arrive. Piño and his wife were later released.

The soccer club issued a statement from Piño that he fully respects Saudi law. He said that he and his wife had been shopping for

clothing they could wear that would be "more respectful" of Islamic customs.

*Sharq* reported that after the incidents Piño's wife has asked that the family leave the country. The Al Nasr club has asked its Argentinean coach Gustavo Costas to try to convince the couple to change their minds but so far he has not been able to do so.

In September, Costas — who was head coach for the Peruvian soccer team Alianza Lima before coaching Saudi Arabia — revealed some details about his new life to Peru's *El Comercio* newspaper. He recalled that while he was in Lima, he made the sign of the cross before every game and wore a rosary around his neck. Now in Saudi Arabia, he said, "I can't do it. I do it before heading out to the field, in the locker room. If I sign myself, they'll kill me or stone me," Costas said. ✕

## Uganda: CRC bicyclists 'ride for refuge'



SOROTI, Uganda (CRCNA) — Members from a group called Team Beyond made a grueling 28-mile ride over rough trails and one-and-two-track roads in Soroti, Uganda, on September 29 because they take their faith seriously. The Ride for Refuge was a multi-

organization, multi-national effort to raise funds for ministry to those need.

"Under the hot African sun [we rode] the 28 miles to Lake Kyoga and back," said Tim Sliedricht, a Christian Reformed World Missions (CRWM) missionary. He and his wife, Angie, work in partnership with a ministry called International Teams in Uganda.

Joining the Sliedrichts on the ride were other CRWM-supported missionaries working in Uganda, as well Ugandans who participated with the help of money raised from the ride.

On the same day more than 220 members of Team Beyond, which is made up of many members of the Christian Reformed Church, volunteered at the event or rode through

## Newfoundland: Funding denied over beliefs, says head of Catholic maternal health group

ST. JOHN'S, Newfoundland (CNA) — A Catholic maternal health group has been denied Canadian government funding for the eleventh time in nearly a decade, while organizations such as Planned Parenthood receive millions of taxpayer dollars, says the president of the health group.

"We were told that we would never get funding simply because we wouldn't provide 'reproductive health,' that we were 'too Catholic' and too close to the Pope," Dr. Robert Walley, president of Matercare International, told CNA. Walley's organization, a group of worldwide Catholic gynecologists and obstetricians, works to reduce the over 330,000 preventable maternal deaths that occur each year in developing countries.

On October 3 the news was confirmed; Matercare had been excluded yet again from funding by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This time, it happened in the context of the 2010 Muskoka initiative aimed at providing global maternal health care, immunization and nutrition.

Prime Minister Harper recently announced the names of 28 projects that would split the \$82 million in funding available between now and 2016. Groups awarded the money included Planned Parenthood (funded \$6 million), the United Nations Population Fund, World Vision and the Canadian Red Cross.

A few Christian organizations, such as the Presbyterian World Service and Development and the Christian Children's Fund of Canada were also given a share.

"Every one of those groups are very large, very wealthy. It means that smaller agencies like us are being frozen out," Walley said. He asserts that CIDA "decided some years ago to eliminate smaller NGOs and especially those with certain faith-based backgrounds."

MaterCare International, which has been operating since 1985, had requested \$2.2 million in funding to open a hospital near its thriving clinic in Isiolo, Kenya. "We've done all of this work," Walley said.

"It's existing, it's standing there."

### Adding insult to injury

Ironically, Walley — a prominent physician who was appointed by Pope John Paul II to serve on the Pontifical Council for Health — was asked for his input on the Muskoka initiative as it was being organized. "I was invited to the Prime Minister's office to brief and advise about this initiative" before Matercare was denied funding, he recalled. "It's insulting, really."

Walley also said that MaterCare is being refused money based on its Catholic stance against abortion and contraception. But that should be a "complete non-issue" and should have no influence on CIDA's decision, he believes. "Abortion and birth control are irrelevant to solving the problem of maternal mortality," he said. "All the deaths occur during the last three months of pregnancy during labour and delivery and one week after — so what on earth is a birth control pill or a condom going to do?"

Stressing the urgency of the issue, Walley explained that maternal mortality is "the number one health problem among women of the childbearing age in the world." A close second is the devastating and socially ostracizing condition of fistulas, which can occur during birth and only be fixed by an operation.

Walley said that in the West, only around one in 10,000 women are at risk of death during childbirth, "but in parts of Africa it's one in seven." To ignore the problem or to obstruct others in their attempt to solve it "is a form of violence to women."

In response, MaterCare International has called for a new plan for mothers that would see increased investment in health care for mothers and unborn babies in the developing world. "We've got a tyranny of the culture of death," he said, and Matercare is among the few groups who are opposing it.

"Motherhood should be of profound significance to us as a [Roman Catholic] Church," he emphasized. Not only did the Virgin Mary say "Yes" but "none of us would be here if we didn't have a mother."

Faith-based agencies provide up to 70 percent of all health care in the developing world. ✕



the streets of Grand Rapids, Michigan and elsewhere as part of the effort.

In 2010, the ride brought in \$980,000 to help several denominations and Christian organizations fund many causes. Much of the money Team Beyond raises will help fund what are called "transformation expeditions" which work with "the least, last and lost," such as former child-soldiers, street kids, orphans and widows.

Members of the Transformation Expeditions focus on mobilizing people with whom they work to grow deep roots in a biblical worldview, to develop love for God, to value human life and to spread that love

and value to others.

Made up of 23 riding groups, Team Beyond gets its name from the ministry team in Uganda for which the Sliedrichts and others work. "With a vision to see lives and communities transformed by the love of God, our mission in Uganda is to mobilize the local church to help the oppressed," the Sliedrichts say on their blog. "More specifically, our mission is...to reach out with the Father's love to the poor, the slave and the blind."

Team Beyond riders in Canada took to the streets on Saturday, Oct. 15 as part of the Ride for Refuge. ✕



## News

## Redeemer College completes domed sports field

Marian Van Til, with files from RUC

ANCASTER, Ont. – “It only took four hours to complete the most striking feature of a project two years in the making,” says a news release from Redeemer University College.

The “striking feature” in question is the fabric roof on the college’s new soccer/sports field. The dome, inflated on September 23, was the last major structural component of Redeemer’s Sports Complex.

The domed field was planned and constructed in partnership with the Ancaster Soccer Club. Besides the involvement of that club – which will use the field for its indoor soccer program – \$3.6 million was contributed for construction costs by the federal, provincial and local governments.

The college is calling this a “transformative project” for Redeemer’s athletic programs. The domed field, which will be the primary field used for competitions and varsity games, has so-called Class A artificial turf, as well as lights and bleachers.

The dome is designed to be able to be removed so that events can be held in the open-air in spring, summer and fall. The domed field is attached to a new fieldhouse where there are home and visitor change rooms, washrooms, offices and concessions.



The existing, open-air soccer field is still in place as well. However, its previously grass surface has been replaced with artificial turf and it was also given lights and bleachers. Now, not only will it have a longer season of use, but it can be used longer each day as well.

Thanks to another kind of technology, the Redeemer website contains a photo sequence which reveals the five-month construction span of the Sports Complex in two minutes, courtesy of time-lapse photography ([redeemer.ca](http://redeemer.ca)).

As is often the case with such projects, a few finishing touches remained to be completed a month after the dome was inflated, with the official opening ceremony scheduled for Saturday, October 22. The college says the new Sports Complex is available for groups to rent for sporting events, exhibitions or other occasions.

## Britain: Schools penalized for resisting sex ed

LONDON (TCI) – Primary schools in England are being penalized for resisting pressure to teach sex education to young children, a new report warns. The report, published by the Family Education Trust, says some local authorities are withholding the coveted “Healthy Schools” status from such schools.

British primary schools are under no legal obligation to teach sex education. The decision is left to each school’s board of governors after consultation with parents. Therefore, says Norman Wells, the report’s author, “Primary schools that make a principled decision not to teach sex education should not be stigmatized and denied a sought-after award for that reason. There is nothing inherently ‘unhealthy’ about a primary school that decides not to teach sex education.”

The report disclosed that almost one in five local authorities said primary schools which do not teach sex education beyond the requirements of the science national curriculum could not qualify for Healthy Schools status.

As to secondary schools, the Family Education Trust

found a “significant minority” of local authorities were more comfortable with schools inviting in external groups to teach about condom use rather than groups which teach about delaying sex until marriage.

The report found that some local authorities said a school with a policy of not referring pupils to contraceptive and sexual health services would not be eligible for Healthy Schools status. And while there was “widespread agreement” among local authorities that primary schools were not expected to refer children to services offering advice on contraception and sexual health, some did not rule it out entirely. Indeed, one authority “went so far as to state that all primary schools were expected to have such arrangements in place.”

Norman Wells says, “It is ironic that in some local authority areas, the Healthy Schools Programme is undermining the healthiest messages of all and depriving young people of learning about the physical, emotional and social benefits of keeping sex within a lifelong, mutually faithful marriage.”

## Dordt named best college in Iowa

SIOUX CENTER, Iowa (DC) – Dordt College has been ranked fifth on the *U.S. News and World Report’s* (USN&WR) 2012 list of Best Regional Colleges in the American Midwest. Dordt was honoured with the highest ranking of any college in Iowa on the Best Regional Colleges list. The college was begun by and is largely supported by members of the Christian Reformed Church.

“The fact that we are firmly established in the top five in recent years demonstrates Dordt College’s commitment to academic excellence,” said college president Dr. Carl Zylstra. “We are grateful that our peers recognize the great value of a Dordt College education.”

For the second time, Dordt was named to the “A-plus Schools for B Students” category as one of a handful of high-achieving Midwestern regional colleges where “non-superstars” can thrive and succeed academically. Students at Dordt College have extensive access to dedicated professors, and the college’s “Aspire” program offers an opportunity for motivated students to benefit from a Dordt education.

“We appreciate many national publications recognizing



The Dordt College Chapel/concert hall at the centre of the campus.

what our faculty, staff, alumni and our supporting community have known for many years: that Dordt College is an outstanding choice and a great value, with teaching and a campus culture built around a worldview focused on Christ as Saviour, Redeemer and King,” said Dordt provost Erik Hoekstra.

This year marks the 20th year in a row Dordt has been on the Best Regional Colleges list and the eighth time the college

## U.S.: Notre Dame protests health services mandate

SOUTH BEND, Indiana (can) – The University of Notre Dame has added to the wave of criticism in the U.S. leveled at the proposed Health and Human Services (HHS) mandate (as a result of “Obamacare”) that requires health insurance providers to cover contraception and offers a very narrow exemption for religious groups.

Notre Dame president Father John Jenkins told HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius that the mandate places the university in the “impossible position” of having to defy the teaching’s of its church. (Notre Dame is one of the most prominent Catholic universities in the U.S.)

This summer the department announced federal rules that will require nearly all new health plans, including those of most religious agencies, to cover all government-approved methods of contraception, as well as surgical sterilization.

The guidelines require new health insurance plans to cover what it calls “women’s preventive services” without charging a co-payment, co-insurance or a deductible. Those services include breastfeeding support, domestic violence screening and contraception.

The mandate “would compel Notre Dame to either pay for contraception and sterilization in violation of the church’s moral teaching, or to discontinue our employee and student health care plans in violation of the church’s social teaching,” Fr. Jenkins said.

Notre Dame joined 18 other Catholic universities and colleges, Catholic agencies, the U.S. bishops and numerous Protestant Christian organizations and clergy who have reacted strongly against the proposition. Christians were encouraged to oppose the measure by contacting HHS before the Sept. 30 comment deadline had passed.

Another point of contention among Catholics and other Christians is that the proposed mandate offers exemptions only if a “religious” employer “has the inculcation of religious values as its purpose,” “primarily employs persons who share its religious tenets,” and “primarily serves persons who share its religious tenets.”

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, chairman of the U.S. bishops’ pro-life committee, noted that that definition is so narrow that it excludes most Catholic and other Christian social service agencies and healthcare providers.

The mandate goes against the U.S.’s “history of federal conscience statutes that have been in effect to protect individuals and organizations like ours,” said Notre Dame’s Fr. Jenkins. Religious groups, he added, should not be required “to participate in, pay for, or provide coverage for certain services that are contrary to our religious beliefs or moral convictions.”

Jenkins urged Sebelius to broaden the scope of the exemption for religious employers and honor the U.S.’s tradition of “profound respect for the rights of conscience.”

The proposed rules are scheduled to take effect in August 2012.

has placed in the top 10. This year, the category measures the top 75 percent of all colleges in the region: 97 academic institutions in the 12 states from Kansas to Ohio that focus on undergraduate education in liberal arts and professional fields such as business, nursing and education. Colleges are ranked on factors such as freshmen retention rates, graduation rates, student-to-faculty ratios and alumni giving rates.

Dordt College is enjoying its highest enrollment in a decade. It now has more than 1400 students from 30-some states and 17 countries outside the U.S. Dordt has also been recognized recently as one of America’s best colleges by *Forbes.com*, the *Princeton Review* and *Washington Monthly*.



## News

# Schools in Haiti feed mind and body

Emily Wierenga

President Michel Martelly's goal for every child in Haiti to be attending school by the end of his five-year term is ambitious, says David Korpela – country representative for Finn Church Aid (FCA) – yet not impossible, thanks to the FCA and other members of ACT Alliance.

While enrolment numbers have dropped severely since the earthquake of January 2010, which destroyed an estimated 5,000 schools, hope in the education system is slowly being restored – and reconstructed.

Sometime during the month of October, the children of Leogane, a Haitian town 17 kilometres southwest of Port au Prince, will trade in their “tent school” for a building constructed from earthquake debris – a pilot project in a unique school-building programme headed by the FCA and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Aptly called School of Hope, the building will replace École Saint Matthieu. Not only will the new school assume Matthieu's educational role; it will attempt to calm the fears of children traumatized by the natural disaster. “Children reacted very differently after the earthquake,” says Desdunes Junior, a French and Creole teacher at Saint Matthieu. “Some of them were very scared and they were crying during school. But, with the help of psychosocial support, we've been able to get them over it.”

FCA's hope is that this might be the first of many schools to provide “a practical, safe and inspiring environment in which children who have lived through extraordinary upheavals and distress can keep their hopes

for a better future alive.”

The building – funded in part by the United Nations – is designed to be safe against hurricanes, floods and earthquakes. Natural ventilation, temperature control and electric lighting are included, as are window shutters scrawled with words in Creole, French, English and Finnish. The colours of the school – red, blue and green – reflect the Haitian flag and the FCA logo.

This project, in addition to the permanent, lightweight one replacing St. Joseph in Embouchure, is one of 11 reconstruction projects planned by the FCA for 2011.

“Our goal is to continue to build approximately 10 new permanent schools each year to slowly work towards rebuilding the estimated 5,000 schools destroyed in the earthquake,” says Korpela.

In addition to providing shelter for students, the construction of these sites has given employment to parents, with the FCA hiring on engineers and carpenters. “By training our local staff, we can also little by little give them more responsibility in the reconstruction of their own country,” says Reconstruction Manager Sari Kaipainen.

Yet poverty, homelessness and hunger remain the primary concerns for families in Haiti.

“The price of food has been on the rise in Haiti and the trend is expected to continue through 2011,” says ACT's website. “Rural areas are still under threat from the cholera epidemic, as new pockets... have been reported in remote areas.”

With the UN estimating that three million Haitians will go hungry in coming months,

leaders of the Episcopal Church Bureau Anglican d'Education en Haiti (BAEH) – overseeing 250 schools across the country – have declared a need for a school lunch program.

As a result, the FCA is partnering for the first time with the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF) to provide free lunches to 7,000 students. “Right now, school kitchens are being equipped and food purchased to get ready for the opening of schools,” says Korpela.

These lunches consist of a local dish known as “sauce pois” or rice and bean soup. Schools are also being provided with cooking oil and salt. In total, this will cost 50 dollars per student for the year.

The program, which began October 1, was inspired when FCA staff – working with earthquake-affected schools since January 2010 – noticed the attention span of students waning as mornings wore on.

“Children quickly revealed the fact that most of them had not eaten breakfast before they came to school,” says Korpela. “Many children were only served one small meal in the evening.”



Many Haitian schools were destroyed by the earthquake of January 2010.

While providing lunch for such a large number poses a logistical problem, it is increasing enrolment. “The program is an incentive for parents to send their children to school instead of making them work in the fields.”

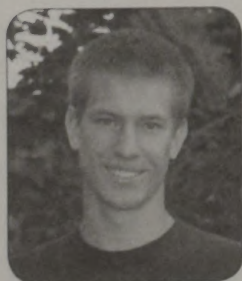
To further the reconstruction of schools and the luncheon program, Korpela urges Canadian believers to support Haitian churches.

“The churches in Haiti pay the salaries of teachers and bear all the costs of operating schools,” he explains. “Any assistance these churches receive is invested back into the communities, giving children education and hope for a brighter future.”

Emily Wierenga is an author, artist and freelance writer who lives with her husband and two boys in Neerlandia, Alta. Please visit [emilywierenga.com](http://emilywierenga.com) for more information.



## What Christian education means to Stephen Boersma



Going to a Christian school has been the best thing that has ever happened to me. The feelings of community and friendship are paralleled by no other educational experience. My favourite parts about Christian education at my school are the tight community, and the ability for everyone to share what they are thinking.

My name is Stephen Boersma and I am a grade 12 student at London District Christian Secondary School. I have always gone to Christian school, and am very thankful that I do. One of the assets of a private school is the ability

to know everyone. This doesn't necessarily mean that I am friends with absolutely everybody in my school, but rather that if I pass someone in the hallway I at least know their name. Belonging to a small, tightly knit community can be the most heart-warming thing – a sense of purpose in being there.

The beauty of Christianity itself is that there is hope for the future. Without my faith, I would have been left at a crossroads with no direction to go. Within the community of fellow Christians, my social life has helped my education life, which in turn has helped my spiritual life. For instance, the other day one of my closest friends sent me a message asking if I thought that the random weather happening in our area and elsewhere was a sign of the End of Days. While this might have turned into an eventually light-hearted conversation, it really got me thinking. Ever since then, I have been reading my Bible more, drawn into the elusiveness of the meanings of John's Revelation.

Essentially what I am saying is that Christian education, and the fellowship of Christian friends, has helped me with my faith. The values I have learned and seen in others while at my school have changed and moulded me for the better. I have my parents to thank for choosing to send me to a place where I can build my faith, while learning and acquiring the skills necessary to have a successful future.

## What Christian education means to Eryn Westerveld



For my whole life, Christian and school have been synonymous. I've been educated from a Christian perspective for 13 years, and it still hasn't fully dawned on me what a blessing this is. I've realized that Christian education means more than prayers before lunch, the absence of locks on the school lockers or reading the Christian purpose on the course syllabus each semester.

“We love because he first loved us” is a well-known Bible verse that most Christians have recited at one point or time. I believe the true beauty of Christian education is that through teachers and the community, God's love is translated to students. Then we as students learn to express his love to the world. One of the many ways that I have seen God's love shown to the community happened recently. My Christian school just experienced the devastating loss of a fellow student. As a community, we gathered together to grieve, remember and pray. In this way, I believe, we became a blessing of love to fellow students and family. The tight-bond of love and community was evident.

Another example is the fact that in Christian education the teachers translate God's love to students. Whether it is a little extra help to describe that one math problem, or to guide us in making decisions for the future, teachers show God's love to us. In the process, they are teaching us how to show love to others.

Christian education has been important to me because it teaches me that all of life, every square inch, is God's. No Christian education system is perfect and the roads get bumpy. But knowing that God's love is in the place and in the hearts of the community is a huge blessing. During a class last year, I remember learning the saying, “Remember who are you and where you come from.” Now as I set out on my next chapter in life, I will remember who I am: God's beloved child. And where I come from: a loving community and Christian family. Knowing these things is invaluable to me.



# Rethinking Christian education

Leonard Van Harten

We're urged to think about so many different things these days. What to do? Many of us have found it easier not to think as much. Instead, many of us now manage the Information Age with binary judgement: positive/negative, optimistic/pessimistic, productive/counterproductive.

Binary judgement is efficient. Binary judgement does not need to listen long or think hard because it knows beforehand what to listen for. It gauges the tone, the harmonic quality of the message. Other ideas sound simply "safe" or "subversive" to our own. Thoughtful, well-intended, even biblically-based criticism may be quickly dismissed as "negative," "pessimistic" or "counter-productive."

Although these either/or assessments may carry weight as instruments of behavioural management in corporate cultures or within therapeutic circles, they should not govern the Christian mind. The states that are the subjects of binary judgement do not signify a biblical view of reality and are, therefore, neither fundamentally nor ultimately important to redemptive history. Nor do they represent a biblical "style" of thinking; in fact, to "test the spirits" in this way would be to reduce the Christian mind to looking at the bright side.

The Christian mind is not a sunny disposition. It does not serve "Optimism" or "Positive Thinking" because, although they may seem to work for us, they cannot really bless us or finally redeem us. A Christian mind has the mould, the indwelling of God's Word and Spirit, instead of small "a" authorities like political correctness, pop psychology or pragmatism.

Thinking critically about fundamental issues, be it from a Christian perspective or not, can be unsettling, and this will make it seem counter-productive if you're trying to build consensus. If there is property at stake, it's just plain insane. The "troubling" nature of critical thinking may be why we would much prefer to spend our time polishing the surfaces or streamlining the structures of our institutions than to genuinely testing their spirits. To many of us, displaying an ISO number would make more sense.

## Driven by fear?

If a GM plant slowly started to make Ford products, what should it do? Should it alter the assembly line, change its name to Ford or just look at the bright side? Or what if a Christian school slowly but surely started to cultivate individualism, competition and consumption. Should it just look at the bright side? Change its name to "Winners"?

Our schools may now be driven more by fear, the fear that fewer and fewer will come if we seek first the Kingdom, than by faith. It is this fear that may be most responsible for, as Calvin Seerveld once called it, the "businessification" of our schools, that is, the implementation of all those things which make for good marketing and strong enrolments.

In our efforts to outsmart decline and failure, to grow, and even to achieve "maximum results," our confidence has shifted to princes, "professionalism" and the whims of a society in love with technology. By exchanging wisdom for wizardry, we are increasingly offering stones for bread: enough "purpose" to package, enough "mission" to market, and enough "equipping for service" to be a success.

But can't we do both? If we can multitask, why can't we multipurpose? Can't we prepare students "to compete successfully in a global economy and a rapidly changing world" and still be counter-cultural? Not in good conscience. Like a Wal-Mart, our appeal might grow, but our salt will lose its saltiness. We cannot have it both ways.

We seem bound by necessity, which we often call reality. We seem to have no choice but to play the game, "stay ahead of the game," "get a piece of the action." But no choice is bondage, slavery. No choice is fatalism.

## A new necessity

Speed and efficiency, which is what we must forever measure and chase if we are to avoid being "left behind," run in the opposite direction of Shalom. They are idols, and their worship is making the world restless and sad. "Should that trend be followed in Christian education?" asks Bob Goudzwaard in his essay "Towards a Future of Care." Could our Christian schools develop distinctive programs that do more than serve the idols of our time?

We need a new necessity for Christian education, one obedient not to Mammon, to the gurus of growth or to the priests of profit, but to the rule of God. This new necessity would take seriously the call "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." If we cannot imagine this alternative, how will our children?

Most of us in the Reformed tradition are familiar with Abraham Kuyper's "There is not one square inch of the universe over which Jesus Christ does not say, 'It is mine!'" This "spatial," "jurisdictional" vision of Christ's Lordship inspired the building of our Christian schools as well as several other kinds of Christian institutions.

Most of these schools are still standing. What is fading appears to be Kuyper's vision of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Maybe its time has come (Ecclesiastes 3). Maybe it's time to ask some questions, not about the truth of Christ's Lordship, but about what it may mean. Is "It is mine" the only way to understand the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Might the Spirit be blowing another vision into the sons and daughters of God? Might there be another way to expand the rule of God, to "gain ground" for Christ, to lift high the name of Jesus? Might the "Lordship of Jesus Christ" be fading but also crumbling before a less triumphal, less territorial (and more Christ-like?) understanding of Christ's lordship? What if we were to serve the person of our Lord, instead of his lordship?

## Serving the person of Christ

The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

"You did for me," his person. What would it mean if we were to serve the person of Christ? It would not mean "customer service" or "service with a smile." It would be more radical than "You're a somebody." According to Matthew, to serve our Lord means to serve the least, those "left behind." For Goudzwaard it would mean "choosing the side of who or what needs care, and nurturing what is so easily left behind." It would mean life before growth.

Counter-productive? That would depend on your paradigm, your view of the "facts of life." Idealistic? Not really. In fact, Goudzwaard believes we have it backwards. What has been understood as "realistic" for five centuries is turning out to be "idealistic."

What won't work, as Goudzwaard explains, is what we're doing now: "It is the striving towards a maximum dynamic expansion of economy and technology which is ultimately 'idealistic,' because the earth cannot take it; because people cannot carry it; because the poor cannot sustain it. In this present time, there is a growing urgency for the invasion of a clear and outspoken biblical realism within our modern society."

## A lighter burden

The time has come for us to crawl out from beneath our fears and bear a much lighter burden. The yoke, the reality, the necessity that we are called to serve is, as N.T. Wright succinctly states in *The Challenge of Jesus*: "the way of being in Christ, in the Spirit, at



Have Christian schools become like a GM plant that makes Ford products?



the place where the world is in pain, so that the healing love of God may be brought to bear at that point."

We need to cultivate a broadly sympathetic imagination in our students. We must nurture students who love and care for the creation and each other, and, as Peter Schuurman the Eternal Student once profoundly put it, "love is slow."

We need to do more than teach. We also need to be convincing. With the aid of the Spirit, we must try to convince our children that it really and truly is first and foremost about caring, not achievement or success.

We are not called to be successful. We are called to be faithful. What would our schools not only look like but be like if we all desired to serve the least with our lives? Of more interest: What would the rest of the world be like?

Christian education as if Christ died and rose again to set all free, as if all people mattered, as if the whole earth mattered.

JOY TO THE WORLD  
(JOY TO YOU AND ME)

Our children are looking to us to show them the way. ✂

Leonard Van Harten (lelaser@hotmail.com) lives in Thorndale, Ontario, and will climb a ladder to consider better the lily.

## What Christian education means to Alison Janssen



Christian Education has meant a great deal to me in my life. I know that without it, I would not be the same person I am today. It has helped shape my values, morals, and the way I see life. It taught me more about God and aided me in my faith walk with him. It has helped me grow as a person and become a more mature student. Christian education has taught me important lessons on how to live my faith in other aspects of my life.

The teachers and fellow students really encourage you with your faith and help you with your doubts. They help you with your struggles and assist you through all your questions even if they can't always give you an answer. They pray with you and are there for you through your troubles and joys. There is always someone there who you can talk to.

There are many things that I love about Christian education, such as the fact that it provides a loving community and a supportive environment. I love that we can worship and praise God together as a school and are permitted to do this, unlike in a public school. Staff members go out of their way to help you with your classes and the students try to make you feel included. Christian education provides students with a Christian view of life, which is incorporated into everything that we learn since God is involved in every aspect of life. This view of life has helped me see God in everything, and has really helped me grow in my faith. I am thankful that my parents decided many years ago that an education in a Christian school was important for their children.



## Features

## How does your garden grow?

Bob Moore

It seems that when it comes to Christian schools, it's either feast or famine. Some schools are closing their doors, while others are adding more classrooms.

Guelph Community Christian School is adding more classrooms. People ask me why we are growing when their local Christian school is barely staying alive. One answer is that our Lord has something in mind for our school, and is bringing it to pass. And that is always true.

But like the farmer whose fields are being blessed with bounty, it takes a lot of work! While it is true farmers have to rely on our Lord, they also have to study the best practices in seeding, fertilizing, harvesting, storing and marketing, decide which ones apply to their situation, and then work awfully hard to implement them. Anyone who says that we just have to pray is like the farmer who only prayed and then watched while the weeds took over his fields. Christian schools are no different.

About seven years ago, we attended an Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools (OACS) presentation on planning for growth. Jules de Jager, then principal in Cambridge, presented a method for setting and reaching enrolment goals. It was a simple enough plan, but not many of our schools were using it. We were used to forecasting by checking the cradle roll of the local CRC congregation and using that figure to estimate our Kindergarten class five years down the road. It was a very passive approach. To set goals and strategize ways to reach them one step at a time was a new concept. We adopted it. Now we had a road map to follow.

At a similar conference, we heard about the value of a Development Director. At first we worked with a volunteer, and expected her to work on both sides of development, raising funds and recruiting students. We found that these were two different skill sets, and decided to hire someone else to raise funds. That didn't work out so well, and when enrolment dropped, we had to cut that position. We learned that our focus should be on recruitment because tuition came with the new children and could stay with us for the next nine years. So we went back to the volunteer, as an Admissions Advisor with a one-day per week "job description," to recruit students, and boosted our Promotion Committee budget to 10 percent of our total operating budget.

One of the strategies we picked up at an OACS conference was "Welcome Wednesday." Every Wednesday morning, our Admissions Advisor was prepared to meet with anyone who showed up, take them on a tour, and explain the school to them.



Bob Moore ... staying in touch.

We found that recruitment made a difference and enrolment went up, but then so did the number of dropouts because we were not paying enough attention to the needs of the current families. We needed to work as hard on retention as we did on recruitment. Out of this understanding, we created a committee (the sure sign of a Christian school) called Recruitment and Retention (RnR) as a sub-committee to Promotions. This committee continued to attend OACS seminars, but also started drawing on the advice of Daniel Krause at GraceWorks Ministries. He recommends parent surveys as a key recruitment and retention tool. We had often heard that parents are the school's best promoters. GraceWorks techniques helped us turn that into a reality.



### Removing barriers

The RnR Committee started to look at walls that had been put up over the years that were keeping new families away from our school. There were some policies in place that were suspect. For example, we were not to accept a student if his siblings were not also transferring. Another was that we were not to accept students part way through the year unless they had just moved into town. These policies were meant to protect us from getting a school full of "troubled children," but it also excluded the siblings who were not troubled, and caused a net loss to us. As it turned out, the "troubled children" were usually not so troubled when they came under the tutelage of teachers who cared about them and for them. Another wall was an excessive use of acronyms. New families experienced those as a means of indicating whether or not you were in the "inner circle" and, of course, they never were.

Still another wall we had created was the practice of demanding that all parents pass the membership test before we would admit their children. In the early years, of course, this was meant to keep out all except those who agreed to the historic Reformed creeds. The principal became kind of a junior *dominie* (minister), who was supposed to be looking over the shoulder of the parents to make sure they lived by the rules of the congregation. We listened and changed when the OACS advised us that we should separate membership from enrolment, so that we could open up enrolment while continuing to restrict membership. We set up three criteria for enrolment, and none of them included membership. The school had to be able to meet the educational needs of the child. The parents had to sign that while at school their child(ren) would participate in a well-defined list of Christian Activities and Teachings, and the parents had to make a commitment to pay the fees.

But, but, but ...

Over the years, I have used the phrase "the Christian school is an extension of the Christian home" to support the idea that only children from Christian homes should be enrolled. But my experience was that nice children from nice parents often got in, even though the parents were hardly practising Christians. And these children caused few problems. We had no reason to fear them. Then I also experienced some very troubled children from homes that were third generation Christian school supporters who went to church every Sunday and had family altar every day. I experienced church-going Christian parents who allowed their kids to go out for Halloween, watch adult TV shows, and wear revealing outfits. Sometimes, it was the Christian mom who was wearing the heavy make-up and revealing outfit! By the time I had experienced all these different homes, I was left asking, "How can the Christian school be an extension of the Christian home when we can't even define a Christian home?" Now we don't even try. We have our own expectations, and do not rely on the home in that same way. What a relief to get rid of the role of junior *dominie*, snooping into the beliefs and practices of our

school families! It has made our school a stronger Christian environment because our staff takes on the responsibility for the culture of the school; we don't assume that the parents have taught Christian graces and habits to their children. Now you will hear me saying to two mischievous brothers who are wrestling in the hallway, "Maybe you can do that at home, but at school we don't allow headlocks!" Children respond well when, in a climate of warmth and support, expectations are explicitly stated and consistently upheld.

### New community presence

One final wall that needed to be addressed was the name of our school. With all due respect to John Calvin and to our founders who had chosen to honour him, that name was a wall to many prospective parents. That name confirmed, incorrectly, that we were the Dutch school only meant for the children of families from one denomination. We moved very carefully and intentionally through a consultative process as we chose and adopted our new name, Guelph Community Christian School. The name and logo change drew a lot of attention and that was good for recruitment, but we also knew that the novelty could wear off if we did not have a plan to build strategically on that excitement. RnR intensified the use of parent surveys. The principal would report to the membership on issues that were raised and changes that were being implemented to address those issues. The parental community clearly had a voice and valued that involvement.

RnR also invited the teachers to become part of the recruitment process. As our Admissions Advisor takes people on tours, the teachers expect to be interrupted. They come to the door and welcome the visitor warmly with a handshake and a smile. The visitors see that parents are welcome at our school, and that they are viewed as partners, not problems. Teachers are part of the retention process, too, the biggest part probably, as they work respectfully with parents to meet the needs of individual children.

We continue to seek out best practices by reading relevant books like Seth Godin's *Purple Cow* and Jim Collins' *From Good to Great* to see how they might apply to our school. We listen when Deani van Pelt from Redeemer University College warns us that parents in Christian schools today want not only a school that is in keeping with their values, but also a school where their children receive obvious interest and support from individual teachers. We hold cafés with parents and the Admissions Advisor to try to hear the talk before it gets to the parking lot. We take all suggestions and requests seriously, whether they come from parents who are from the third generation of Christian school supporters, or who are only in their third day of involvement with Christian schools. And we continue to pray as though everything depended on prayer. ✕

Bob Moore is the principal of Guelph Community Christian School.



## Features

# Do all in your power, with the help of the Holy Spirit: Christian education in the 60s and today

Bert Witvoet

The year was 1960 when I accepted a teaching position at Hamilton District Christian High School. Three weeks into the school year, on September 23, I married my sweetheart, Alice Oldejans. There was no time for a honeymoon. I was allowed the Friday off so I could get ready for the wedding the next day. Alice and I were both from Bowmanville, and we had decided to look for an apartment in Burlington. Why Burlington, when my new job was in the basement of Mount Hamilton Christian Reformed Church? Because the board thought it would be convenient for the parents if I would drive a little school bus to work every day. After all, another teacher, Tony Ten Kate, had accepted a similar assignment when he and his wife located in St. Catharines so he could take a number of graduates from Calvin Memorial (now Beacon Elementary) in a small bus to the fledgling Christian high school in Hamilton.

This kind of dedication to Christian education was not exceptional. It was simply in the air. Think of the fact that students at the new school lived as far away as Kingston! They were put up in boarding homes so that their parents could be satisfied that they would receive a Reformed Christian educational experience. As recent immigrants to Canada, none of these parents were rich or well established.

## Different times

This was more than 50 years ago. Have times changed? You'd better believe it. And they should change. History cannot be static. Each generation undergoes metamorphoses that forbid us to make simple comparisons, or to say, "Our times were better!" That is the temptation, of course, especially if you compare the kind of dedication our Christian school communities experienced in the post-war immigrant years. But let's compare the society of those years with the society we now live in.

To establish Christian schools in the 50s and 60s, at a time when society was not nearly as secular as it is today, is, in a way, surprising. It certainly was a puzzle to many Canadian Christians who interpreted our actions as isolationist and judgmental. Just think — in the 50s and 60s, Christianity was still considered the indispensable religious component of Canadian culture, at least formally. The Lord's Prayer was faithfully recited in classrooms. Very few people dared to call themselves atheists. Churches were still well attended. Pornography was not tolerated in public magazines, and abortion on demand was illegal, as was gambling. Living together without being married was frowned upon. Divorce was infrequent and difficult to make legal. Teenage sexual mores were strictly monitored by adults, and there was little violence in whatever entertainment children were exposed to. The fabric of society was fairly healthy and strong. The question we may well ask today is, "Why establish Christian schools under these comparatively favourable conditions?"

I once spoke with an imam from Niagara Falls, who said that when he immigrated to Canada in the 60s, he found Canada more true to Islam than Saudi Arabia, where he came from. What he meant was that the moral fiber of Canadian society at that time was superior to the moral fiber of his home country. Today he is extremely disappointed with the immorality that is freely flaunted in Canadian society. He regrets the fact that Christianity is being bleached out of the Canadian fabric of life. As a Muslim he feels less safe in a godless society, he told me, also on behalf of his community, and especially on behalf of his community's children.

## Good question

Another question we may well ask is, "Why is the Reformed community's dedication to Christian education flagging today, as many people believe it is, and as is evident from an overall dwindling enrolment at many Christian schools, even when you factor in a declining birth rate? Shouldn't it be stronger today because of the worsening public climate?"

To answer that question I will first of all address the question why parents, teachers and boards went to such great lengths as they did to establish Christian schools in the 50s and 60s, at a time when Canadian society was much less "dangerous" and much less secular. There has to be an explanation, without resorting to the trite and self-serving answer of "the past was better."

The previous Dutch Calvinist generation came to Canada with a mindset that was coloured by what one could call "covenant theology." These Christian parents simply argued that, although the public school had all kinds of Christian characteristics, it was a state school, and, as such, could not implement the promises they as parents had made at the baptism of their children. When they held up their children for baptism, these parents heard the pastor say that their children were covenant children, incorporated into the Body of Christ. They had to give an affirmative answer to the following: "*Do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community [notice the emphasis on the role of the Christian community] to do all in your power [all in your power speaks of unyielding efforts to make it come true] to instruct them [in the Dutch we added, 'and to have them instructed,' which pointed to catechism but also to Christian schooling] in the Christian faith.*"



Tony Ten Kate and the St. Kitts Bus: Photo courtesy of HDCH archives.

## A matter of principle

Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper gave further content to that promise by saying, "There's not a square inch of life of which Jesus Christ does not say, 'It is mine.'" Thus, education, according to these parents, can never be considered neutral, even if the moral fiber of the school is fairly sound. These early immigrant parents believed that Christian education should never be surrendered to Caesar, because Caesar's image can be found only on money (that is, Christians are supposed to pay their taxes faithfully). But the image of God is stamped on each child, and, therefore, Caesar cannot lay claim on our children: "Give to God what is God's."

So for these immigrants it was not a matter of testing the character of public school education and making an "informed decision" based on what took place in each classroom, but it was a "Reformed decision" based in principle on the nature of covenant education. And this concept of covenant education meant that establishing a Christian school was the responsibility of the Christian

community, regardless of whether one had children to send. This covenantal and Kuyperian way of thinking has been more than proven right by the outcome of public education after 50 or more years. Acting out of obedience to God's norms and laws always bears fruit. Today public schools are powerless to counteract the deteriorating spiritual and moral fiber of our society because of their strong ties to provincial governments and their ministries of education. Satan has found a comfortable niche in the public square of Canadian life. Even an imam from Saudi Arabia has noticed the change. Christian education, truly Christian education, that acknowledges the kingship of Christ in every subject area of classroom instruction and in every social interaction that takes place in the classroom, in the hallways and on the playground is the only effective way for parents to keep their promise made at baptism and the only way for teachers and learners to seek first the Kingdom of God in education.

## Pragmatic approach

So why, at a time when the public system is morally less sound and more open to ungodly thinking and practices, is there slippage in commitment to Christian education in Christian circles, also in Reformed Christian circles? Because today's parents rely less on principled thinking and more on pragmatic considerations. Principled thinking today, also among Christians, carries the connotation of blind submission to a fixed set of beliefs. Principles can be so absolute and they require a lot of faith pitted against certain odds. Pragmatism gives the impression of allowing more freedom to make adjustments. Flexibility is a post-modern characteristic that ranks with tolerance and subjectivism as one of the highest virtues. Parents give many reasons for not sending their child to a Christian school: "It's not that bad in the public school we have chosen," "Christian education is not affordable for our family," "There are more sports and art courses in the public school," "My son or daughter is tired of going to a smaller school," "I know people who attended a Christian school and had a bad experience," and so forth. Pragmatism knows no end of reasons, affirming the old wisdom that there are a hundred and one ways of doing something wrong and only a few ways of doing it right.

So do I hanker after the good old days of the 50s and the 60s? Not really. I enjoy the challenge of living in the current state of affairs in Canada. I'm not in the least bit nostalgic. Each decade has its pros and its cons. There were lots of problems in the early immigrant community that needed correction. Each generation has to face its own challenges while seeking first the Kingdom of God.

The only thing I miss today and wish our Christian community could recapture is the principled thinking and acting of those people who hired me to teach at HDCH and who asked me to do all in my power to safely deliver their rambunctious offspring to the Christian school, so that, "in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community" these children could be instructed in the Christian faith. That's not too much to ask, is it?

*Bert Witvoet taught high school for 18 years and was editor of Calvinist Contact, later named the Christian Courier, for 17 years before he took on the task of being the managing editor of the Christian Educators Journal in his retirement.*



## Features

Can the financial support systems of the Christian school be generous and inclusive? Is it possible to create a *fiscal* "communion of the saints" consistent with the spiritual and educational aspirations of the Christian school society? Originally written for the Toronto District (TD) Christian High School community, *Christian Courier* is pleased to reprint this article by Jennie Das. Its application of biblical principles to the practicalities of financing Christian education deserves wider readership.

— Cathy Smith, Features Editor

## All are blessed!

Jennie Das

Article 9 of TD Christian's Identity Statement reads, "We believe in and foster community. We seek to reflect a commitment to community in all our relationships. Parents, staff and supporters from different cultural, social and denominational backgrounds covenant together to carry out the shared task of educating children; our efforts are to be characterized by trust, cooperation, and service rather than self-interest or individualism... The weak and the strong work together, and in carrying one another's burdens, all are blessed."

How do we practise Article 9 financially at TD Christian? Do we have room for the economically disadvantaged, for diversity of culture and denominations? Or are we becoming a school for the rich? In some sense, our chequebook tells the story of our values and priorities. Do we go it alone, or share resources to carry out a common vision?

To be sure, many families make significant sacrifices to give their children a Christian education, the staff could earn better salaries elsewhere, and supporters may experience "donor fatigue" as governments cut spending and charities rely more heavily on gifts to stay afloat. But when we count the blessings we have received, we no longer think in terms of sacrifice. Parents rejoice in their children's growth and maturity, staff are thankful for their calling to Christian service, and supporters feel privileged to have been part of the "village" that helped raise the next generation to love and serve God and others.

In my 15 years in finance at TD Christian, first as VP of Finance and currently as Consultant, it has been my passion and privilege to help families afford Christian education. There have been many different situations, and no one-size-fits-all solution. Some parents catch a vision for Christian education only after earlier life choices have affected their ability to pay for it. Some have always been passionate about Christian schooling, but carry the weight of unusual long-term stresses that make it virtually impossible to gather the financial resources. Others may have been well-situated to pay at first, but unemployment, business downturns, illness, or marriage breakdown have entered the scene. In such cases, more than ever, it takes a community to bring the vision of Christian education to life.

TD has striven to be and to foster that community, following a consistent pattern in lean years and years of plenty. Our tuition is already structured to help those most likely to need it, since it is family-friendly and provides discounts to those also enrolling children in a Christian elementary school. Still, every year about 10% of our families have needed help in some way, either through a bursary (some tuition forgiven outright) or extra time to pay. In any given year, bursaries averaged 2.2 percent of the total unadjusted tuition amount. Other families received more time to pay — in effect, a loan — with credit for new "loans" generally covered by the payment of previous ones. Meanwhile, over the past

15 years, tuition revenue has more than tripled, reducing the proportion receivable from 10% to less than 3%. While I found this area of financial administration the most challenging in my work at TD, it also provided the greatest joy. Families experienced the blessing of community, and were invariably thankful.

In a well-managed support program, this blessing is enjoyed by all, whether they effectively receive financial help or give it. While the 10% needing help may increase class size by two students, the extra costs are minimal. Therefore *even the reduced tuition the family is able to pay keeps the tuition rate lower for all.* Meanwhile, the school is enriched by the resulting diversity, and by the valuable gifts each family contributes. Increased sensitivity to those with limited resources helps us to appreciate each dollar and continually evaluate our priorities. For both those who give and those who receive financially, there is a heightened sense of the preciousness of Christian education.

In my current role as Director of Finance of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, I see a variety of solutions to the affordability question. Generally, people within the Christian school community continue to affirm a program of support, especially as they become acquainted with families who need help. In fact, this is part of our heritage in the Alliance and at TD specifically. In earlier years, when enrolling parents represented a relatively homogeneous group of recent immigrants, they were required to shoulder only 60% of the cost of educating their children. Families were all in similar economic situations and most needed help to afford Christian education. The supporting community — whole church congregations collectively, grandparents, the childless, those with children too young or too old for school — kicked in the other 40%. Times have changed, and the economic situations of those seeking enrolment have become quite diverse. Most of our parents now *can* afford to pay the full cost, and do: today in most Christian schools, tuition is calculated to cover basic operational costs. But typically there is also some type of bursary program, funded by those same sources, for families who need it. The supporting "village" continues to demonstrate the meaning of community.

TD Christian is graced with many regular supporters who understand the meaning of Article 9 deep in their bones. Please know how much your support encourages not only the families who benefit directly, but all of us who work daily at TD to educate teens for service in the light of God's Word. May those who have experienced the blessing go out and share it with others!

Jennie Das is the  
OACS Director of Finance,  
Consultant, and former TDChristian  
VP of Finance & Admissions.



## Inclusion and exceptionalities

Heidi Kerssies

There is one student I will always remember. He comes to mind often. When I think of him, he is always wearing his red sweater and round, wire-framed glasses. His eyes are looking at me sideways, bewildered and cautious.

Later, he was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome, a condition characterized by an impairment of social interactions. According to a textbook for Special Education, children with Asperger Syndrome misinterpret social cues, lack empathy, appear socially awkward, and are unaware of the rules of conversation. I knew none of this when I taught him. Today, when I think about him, I think about how I must have hurt him as I tried so hard to squeeze him into a box that could not contain him.

Inclusive and exceptionalities are terms used in education. They are used to describe classrooms and students. Classrooms are to be inclusive of students who have exceptionalities. One of the words I love, the other I fear. Inclusive — we are to include everyone; everyone is to be loved and accepted. Everyone has gifts to bring to the community. Who is allowed in? Everyone. What if I can't spell purple? What if I can't read facial expressions? What if I have trouble sitting still? What if I write the number 5 backwards? What if I have trouble hearing? What if I walk with a limp? Guess what — you are all allowed in. At least that is what the word inclusive implies, no one is left out. We are all part of the group.

The other word, exceptionalities, causes me to pause. It comes from the root word *except*. It implies that you don't quite fit, that something is not okay. Currently many children are labeled with some sort of exceptionality, whether they have a learning disability, a hearing impairment, have attention disorders or are gifted. Each label is varied and encompasses a wide range of attributes. Most exceptionalities contain a spectrum of behaviours and characteristics. What this means is that no two children are alike; there is no one clear label that is going to explain who the child is. What it means is that a word cannot contain all the wonders of a creation of God.

A diagnosis of exceptionality should never dictate who the child is. A child is not autistic, rather a child has autism. Autism becomes one of the many attributes that are used to describe the child. We must always be careful about limiting our vision of the child through the lens of their exceptionality. This is why I am fearful of the word exceptionality. Will we say that this child is normal in every way except in ...?

And then, who defines normal? In a classroom a normal child is one who can sit still, has nice printing, can read a certain list of words by the end of Grade 1, knows his or her multiplication facts in Grade 4, can bounce a basketball with ease, holds his or her pencil in a specific way, and the list goes on. Who decides this list? Who creates the box of attributes for a normal student? Who decided which exceptionalities will be outside of that box?



Everyone belongs.

has helped to create a system where some are in and some are definitely out.

Thus I am encouraged with the push for inclusion. It is a cry that says we all belong. I have always believed that a community is only as strong as its weakest members, and that it can only flourish when all members are allowed to flourish. That is true in a classroom, in a family, in a neighborhood, in a country. Many of our weaker members are weaker because they have been marginalized, silenced because the uniqueness of who they are cannot be contained in the box that defines membership. I say we throw out the box. We open our classrooms, our hearts, our communities to members with exceptionalities, all members who are exceptional.

My student from many years ago, the one who I always remember, is no longer here. But his voice lives in my heart. I am reminded of him each time I try to squeeze a child into a box that cannot and ought not to contain a person. He taught me to love. He taught me that we must make space for everyone and that everyone must be included, no exceptions.

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## Features

## The first wall

*He will be the sure foundation for your times,  
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;  
the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.*

Isaiah 33:6

## Robert J. Gerrits

In a distant time and a distant place there lived a king who had no army. And, having heard of the approach of an enemy, he decided that the time had come to form a fighting force to defend his kingdom.

He called before him his closest advisors and said, "Send emissaries to the north, east, south and west of my kingdom. Tell my people there to choose someone worthy of leading and to send that person to the castle in four days' time to be commissioned."

So emissaries rode forth from the castle to deliver this message.

And four days passed.

From the north, a land of iron and bronze, came a tall man of broad shoulders and handsome good looks. He was the type of man whose strides caused others to run a few steps from time to time to catch up. He clothing was well-tailored, his armour gleamed in the sun and his horse was strong and fitted for battle.

From the south, a land of intellect and wisdom, came a great scholar. He was a man whose mind was quick, and who had experienced much in life. He came carried on a litter with a porter at each corner and many scribes in tow.

From the west, a land of crops and pastures, came a farmer. She was a small woman whose primary concerns were sunshine, rainfall and the state of her crops. Her hands and face were weathered from days in the sun. She came alone leading a small donkey loaded with her supplies.

But from the east came no representative, nor did the original emissary return, for the enemy had already gained a foothold there.

The king held court, and called before him the three selected leaders.

The king said to them, "Word has arrived that an enemy is approaching, and it seems they are already active to the east. You have been chosen to help raise an army. Take whatever resources you need from me and return to your lands. Gather there each of you 1000 of the best fighting men and women. Return here with them in a few days and set up camp to begin training for war. You have 100 days to prepare."

So the leader of the north went north, south went south, and west went west.

And four days passed.

Dust appeared on the horizon as the new army approached from each direction, and soon camps sprung up to the north, south and west of the city.

Training for the great battle had begun.

One month later the king once again called before him his closest advisors and said, "Go to the city walls to observe from afar one day of activity of each camp. Return to me tomorrow with your reports."

The next day the advisor from the north wall stated, "I saw practice with sword and shield throughout the day, and preparations being made for combat. Also, in the late afternoon I heard the sound of metals being worked. It is my report that the camp to the north is training diligently and forging weapons, and is prepared for the coming fight."

The king nodded, and looked to the next advisor.

The advisor from the south wall stated, "During the day I saw troops marching in orderly formations and

great war machines being tested. Also, during the late afternoon I could hear the rustle of paper and the conversations of educated people. It is my report that the camp to the south is studying the ways of war and developing battle plans and is prepared for the coming fight."

Once again the king nodded, and looked to the next advisor.

The advisor from the west wall stated, "What I have seen has discouraged me, for during the day all the camp sleeps, and during the night can be heard the sounds of singing and drunken laughter. To make matters worse, I even observed deserters leaving for home each evening under the cover of darkness. I am afraid the camp in the west is not ready, my lord."

Upon hearing these reports, both good and bad, the king decided he should visit each camp himself, to determine firsthand the state of his newly-formed army. So after some days he set forth, with his advisors and entourage in tow.

Upon arriving at the camp to the north, he summoned their leader and said, "How go the preparations?"

The leader from the north replied, "Each day we practise the ways of war, but in the late afternoon we gather about our forges, and, using iron and bronze, we make masks that as closely as possible resemble your face. On the day of battle the foe will see a multitude of faces that all reflect your glory and power, and they will run away in fear. In addition, each evening, as we eat together, one of our midst goes before us, and, donning the mask, does an impersonation of the king. If the performance is well done, we cheer. If not, he or she is put out of the camp gates as unworthy to be in your great army."

"And how many of your 1000 remain?" asked the king.

"We are fully 922 strong, my lord. The weak among us have been removed," replied the leader of the north.

"And if the day of battle was today, would you be ready?"

The leader's face went white and he replied, "There are many among us who are not finished their masks! Even now we wait for a shipment of ore to complete this important work. We are not ready, my lord. The battle cannot be today!"

The king, though disappointed, did not want to publicly pronounce judgment, and so, hoping the next camp would demonstrate better results, he invited the leader of the north to accompany him there.

Upon arriving at the camp to the south, the king summoned their leader and said, "How go the preparations?"

The leader from the south replied, "Each day we practise the art of sword and shield, but in the late afternoon we turn our energy to study. We have taken all that you, my king, have written about war and have divided it into 100 equal readings. Each day we study one part. In addition, each evening as we eat together, one of our midst goes before us and we test them on the studies of the day. Those found wanting, who have not memorized the reading of the day, are put outside of our gates, as they are unworthy to be in your great army."

"And how many of your 1000 remain?" asked the king.

"We are fully 943 strong, my lord. The ignorant among us have been removed," replied the southern leader.

"And if the day of battle was today, would you be



ready?"

The face of the leader of the south twitched slightly, and he replied, "We are only on day 38 of the readings, my lord. We have not fully read the 100 pages! We are not ready. The battle cannot be today!"

Again disappointed, the king invited the leader of the south to accompany him to the next camp.

Upon arriving at the camp to the west, the king summoned their leader and said, "How go the preparations?"

"Excellent, my lord," the leader from the west replied.

The king asked, "I have heard reports that the men and women of this camp sleep all day, and that the evenings at this camp are filled with revelry. I have also heard that many have deserted in the night. How do you respond to these charges?"

The leader from the west replied, "It is all true, in its own regard, my lord, but allow me to explain. We do sleep all day, but we rise each evening and start our night together with food. At that meal one of our midst goes before us and raises a sandal in the air. They then tell the story of their sandal, the story of where they have walked in this life. We hear their words, and we make their life our own, and we embrace them as brother and sister."

The leader paused, and then she continued, "In addition, after this meal we split into four groups. The first group returns home under the cover of darkness and gathers food, and then returns and stockpiles it in the city to prepare in case we are put under siege. One group travels to the northern camp and another group to the south and there they wait outside the camp gates. If anyone is put out from those camps, they are welcomed with open arms and brought back to our camp, and the evening is spent rejoicing with those who have joined us."

The leader paused, and then she looked into the king's eyes and said, "The fourth group, the largest group, marches each evening to the east of the city, and, under torchlight, starlight and moonlight, we practise the ways of war. We put ourselves each night as the first wall of defence between the city and the approaching storm."

"And how many of your 1000 remain?" asked the king.

"We are today 1135 strong, my lord," she replied.

"And if the battle was today, would you be ready?" asked the king.

And 1135 voices shouted in unison, "We are ready!"

*Robert Gerrits is a computer science teacher at Smithville Christian High. This devotional was originally written for and presented at the 2008 OCSTA Teachers Convention*





## Columns

From the 11th  
Province

Marian Van Til



I have Crohn's disease. It has been with me for years and is greatly exacerbated by stress. It is one of the serious gastrointestinal illnesses that plagues ever-larger numbers of people.

Stress: it has countless manifestations in us fallen human beings, the more so in our age of frantic activity and lonely isolation. If you have a genetic weakness, physical or mental, stress will find you there. As part of the "cure" there are drug-related remedies, emotional-therapy approaches and even diet-related answers. I myself am Exhibit A for what the right diet can do for both healing and prevention.

I thank God for the knowledge that modern medicine has been able to use in treating disease. But the ultimate cure for stress is not medicinal, it is faith-related. I am not implying that a right relationship with God will miraculously wipe away serious physical or emotional illness — though I certainly believe in miracles, as all biblical Christians must. I recognize that we live in a sin-sick world and we are saturated with sin's effects.

God knows when, and how, and how much we suffer. But he does test us. The King James Version, which I grew up with, says he *chastens* those he loves. I like that phrase, embodying, as it does, loving correction. If you have children you know that they've needed help — sometimes a lot of it — to stay on the straight and narrow.

As the ultimate example of a good Father, God, too, disciplines his children: he reproves, restrains and, yes, punishes us. Sometimes it's painful, deeply so. The Refiner's Fire burns. But he doesn't sadistically enjoy our anguish, as some say. The Fire melts away the dross to reveal the remaining precious metal. How we respond is of great importance, now and through eternity.



God uses stress to remind us to trust in him.

## If you but trust in God to guide you

### All we like sheep

When I am stressed and the stress starts to effect me physically once again, I recognize (by now) that it is a sign of my going too much my own way, silly sheep-like. God uses this stress as a reminder to me that I'm trying to run my life in *my* way and am not trusting him with wholehearted, child-like faith. He then always leads me — if I care to look — to the parts of his Word that I most need to be reproved by, comforted by and to profit from.

I have currently taken on four different new projects that are, or will, allow me to make more use of talents God has given me and which will give me a greater sense of purpose. I fervently prayed for such openings. But now that God has dumped them in my lap I want to retreat. I feel unprepared. "This is too much," I've told him. "I didn't *really* want this. I don't have the time or energy. I need more time for *me*. I'm overwhelmed. I'm stressed out."

I'm sure that God hasn't been impressed with my whining after he gave me exactly what I asked for. How do I know? Because when I tried to do my Jonah act, I only felt more stress. But when I prayed for the strength to do all those projects, and do them well, my stress subsided. In addition, for the last number of mornings when I've done my daily Bible reading, I've read repeatedly the consoling truth that God will uphold me. "Cast your care on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall," I read a few mornings ago in Psalm 55. "When I am afraid I will put my trust in you," I read the next morning. (But was I really making that my own confession?) Then I read, "I cry out to God Most High, to God *who fulfills his purpose for me* [my italics]. God sends his love and his faithfulness" (Psalm 57). Then this: "I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble." And finally: "My soul finds rest in God alone. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken" (Psalm 62).

I eventually "got it." I felt more than a little sheepish (as well I should) that God had to metaphorically whack me over the head with the truth that, if I will but trust him, he will guide me and sustain me in these new opportunities he's given me — just as he has always done when I've gone his way and not my own. And so I can only confess with the Psalm I read this morning (a bit ironically, since the images are both food and music-related, the two things I enjoy most): "My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you" (Psalm 63:5).

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, NY.

SUSTAINING  
Pastoral  
EXCELLENCE



## Calling all who minister

Cecil van Niejenhuis

Has the concept of "calling" been hijacked by the institutional church? I wonder. In our Reformed theological tradition we acknowledge the priesthood of all believers. Every Christian has direct access to the throne of grace and the personal God who chairs the universe; every Christian personally represents that God in life; and every Christian in every place of work may view that as their place of calling.

Using the gifts which God has given is a framework for our life and work as the church, but not only the institutional church! Using the gifts God has given is a framework for our life and work as families, neighbors, workers and citizens. Whenever and wherever we are using the gifts God has given for the well-being of those around us, we are engaged in meaningful ministry. Some work may be more strategic, some more mundane, but it's all meaningful ministry.

Within the church, we have developed patterns (traditions) which are largely unquestioned. It is our practice to ordain full-time ministers of the Word with a public acknowledgment of this work as a distinct calling from God, confirmed in the official call of a congregation. Similarly, when office bearers are called to serve, there is a public acknowledgment of God's call to these offices confirmed through the voting of the membership. All of this is good.

Then there is a cluster of committed volunteers comprised of church school teachers, youth leaders, committee leaders and the like whose giftedness and willingness to take up ministry roles is acknowledged in a service of commissioning. These roles are identified as significant ministries, requiring diligence and giftedness. But we do not usually speak of a call to such roles. Is that because there is no voting involved, only appointing and volunteering?

There are still other functions within the church which require diligent, gifted volunteers. There are a variety of serving, encouraging, maintenance and hospitality tasks which receive only a little public acknowledgment and for which there is no commissioning, let alone ordaining.

Inadvertently, we have established a pecking order within the church with respect to "calling." The concept of God's hand in leading certain people to pursue certain kinds of work becomes especially associated with positions of full-time ministry in the institutional church. Deacons, elders and ministry associates share in this special status during their terms of office and in ways which other church volunteers do not. At the top of this "food chain" of calling are those in professional ministry. This is not our official theological position, but it does seem to be our practiced reality. And this is not good.

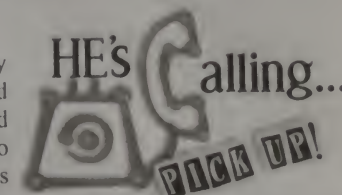
The privileged and unique position of ministry as a career path which is a recognized calling from God and from God's people — exists relative to other ministry functions within the church and relative to career paths outside of the church. Again, this is not what the priesthood of all believers suggests, but this is what our experience reveals. To parody the words of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, "All of us are equals and in ministry, but some of us are more equal and more in ministry than others."

In this context, it is helpful to review the Scriptures which speak of God's gifts. There are four such passages in the New Testament, each of which acknowledges that gifts are graces of God intended for the well-being of the entire community. But note the differences: in Romans 12 we read of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, contributing, leading and showing mercy. In 1 Corinthians 12 the identified gifts are that of apostle, prophet, teacher, miracle-worker, healer, helper, administrator, tongue-speaker and interpreter. Ephesians 4 mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. And in 1 Peter 4 the gifts of God are mentioned rather broadly as speaking and serving.

Why would the church ordain workers in only some of these gift categories? Could we imagine a church which ordains those gifted in contributing, to the office of Donor? The office of Administrator? Healer? Tongue-speaker? What these gift passages do is remind us that the calling of a minister of the Word is rooted in the general call to ministry which exists for all Christians. Could we imagine the church ordaining folks into ministries of craftsmanship and trades so that daily work and calling truly intersect?

The ministry of the Word relates to both calling and job. Always. And at the very same time. My contention is that this is also true for everyone else.

Cecil is a consultant for the Office of Pastor Church Relations in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. He's been pastoring churches for almost 30 years. These experiences have taught him that excellence is best served in a marinade of grace.





## Columns

## Everyday Christian

Cathy Smith



I was asked if I would be willing to put up a Thanksgiving bulletin board at church. I said, "Sure." So I went home to check out my boxes and supplies. That's when it hit me—I'm a hoarder. I

have over 200 pieces of student artwork, 30 journals, 20 poetry projects, six or seven essays by high school students, and about 100 short stories, poems and paragraphs written by elementary students. I have all my daybooks from over two decades of teaching. I have eight binders filled with scrounged "good ideas" and dozens of file folders with articles on pedagogical topics and bulletin board ideas. Maybe I need a reality show intervention.

I've been retired five years now from teaching in the Christian school system. I wonder why I have such hard time letting go of this stuff. I do not plan to return to teaching. Yet the physical process of weaning myself from the "stuff" of my career has turned out to be more emotional than I expected. I can't do it. Somehow that stuff is me, every piece of art, every creative story written by an eager student, every exam I laboured over, all those files so carefully organized.

**They remind me how immeasurably blessed I was ... where the classroom was redeemed by the presence of Christ and the chalk dust and mud in the hallway was holy ground.**

I sort through art samples looking for Thanksgiving ideas. Time collapses. Here's a pastel composition, lilac blossoms and tulips exquisitely rendered by a Grade 6 student. A lesson on foreground and background. Here's a seagull, painstakingly created from construction paper confetti. A lesson on texture. It took incredible patience by a Grade 8 student, working with a toothpick and a glue stick, to layer hundreds of circles into a perfectly proportioned bird in flight.

Each essay, story and poem reminds me of the challenges of teaching writing: that initial writer's block, the tedium of drafts, first and second, and sometimes third, still stapled together, my handwritten encouragements on the back. The stunning results that can still move me, like this perceptive haiku from a Grade seven student:

## Season of thankfulness

Winter's gentle snow falling weightless as paper, weighing down branches.

I've counted. My best estimate, given the vagaries of record-keeping and students who sometimes slip into a school and out again before you've even found a desk for them, is that I've taught over 600 students. Like their art and their stories, somehow they, too, are "me." The one who made me cry in the staff room in my first year, the one whose compassion I counted on every day for two years to offer support to a disadvantaged peer, the one who lost his dad, the three who lost their moms, the one who was intelligent but couldn't read, the one who was bullied and the one who bullied, the one who sang like an angel, the one who made me want to quit, the one who played Anne Frank so brilliantly in my first big drama production, the one who told me to f\*\*\* off, the one who was so gifted I felt abashed to teach him. They've written their names on my heart. I've become huge, bigger than myself, stretched, each one expanding my capacity to believe, to forgive, to endure, to love.

Now, on the other side of the career, it occurs to me that these hoarded bits and pieces of student work, cobbled together in my imagination, form my own pointillistic masterpiece, each one emblematic of a tiny dot of effort in the moment. Fleeting, random. But, stepping back from the canvas, the flecks and dabs arrange themselves into a "still life" portrait. A thankful woman. Me. The one who thought she was teaching when she was really being taught.

When I was teaching, busy, busy, busy, attending to the details of the job, raising a family, supporting church and school ventures, if I was thankful, I was thankful on the fly. Sometimes I was too depleted or too frustrated to be thankful. But retirement is a season of thankfulness. With all those names inscribed on my past, I carry a precious *koinonia*, a fellowship of teaching and learning, into my future, whatever it may bring.

I'll keep those boxes in the basement. They remind me how immeasurably blessed I was to have participated in a communal and incarnational endeavour where the classroom was redeemed by the presence of Christ and the chalk dust and mud in the hallway was holy ground.

And now I recognize that my imaginary artwork is not mine at all. See there in the corner? It's signed by God.

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.

## Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove



**Q.** I am 28 years old, married for six years, a mother of two children (ages four and two), and a former medical receptionist. During the last two years I have been a full-time stay-at-home mother. We realize we are fortunate that I am able to stay home with the children. Both of us are reasonably content with our lives, except for one problem. Before we were married and had children we smoked marijuana at least once a month. Now that we have children I no longer participate in this activity. Unfortunately, however, my spouse has increased his usage. He smokes daily just before entering the house when he comes home from work. I find his stubs in the flowerpot on the shelf in the utility room. While this disturbs me, I am equally annoyed about his usage in group settings. Whenever we get together with our friends, who also have young children, to celebrate a child's birthday, the women participate in the games as planned while the men retreat to the corner of the garden to smoke a joint or two. My female friends are just as annoyed as I am, but most do not want to raise the issue with their spouse so it keeps on happening. I, on the other hand, want to give my spouse an ultimatum but realize this may not solve anything.

**R.** Thanks for sharing your concern in regards to your spouse's increased usage of this mood-altering drug. I understand your annoyance and commend you for wanting to do something about it. There are, however, several issues that need to be addressed. First, I want to remind you that participating in this activity is illegal in Canada at this time. However, I want to leave the legal issue at that. I am more concerned with the implications this activity has for your family. The second issue is your spouse's increased usage of marijuana. To put it into perspective, it is not uncommon for young people to be involved in this activity for a period of time. However, when adult roles encourage them to grow up, most can

## Marijuana: from recreational use to coping mechanism?

readily leave this activity behind or go back to occasional usage. Your spouse, however, has moved from recreational use to using it as a way of coping with life. Which brings me to the third issue.



Your spouse and his male friends are choosing to participate in this activity at the expense of enjoyable family activities. In other words, they disengage as a result of smoking marijuana. This behaviour is not conducive to family life, which brings me to the fourth issue. Your spouse is not sharing this problem with me but you are. In other words, you want to fix it while he may be in denial and thinking nothing is broken. And so, since his usage has increased over time, I suggest you attend a local Al-Anon group (or Narcotics anonymous) so that you can understand better for yourself and begin to develop a plan of how not to unwittingly cooperate with your spouse's behaviour. The fifth issue is for you become absolutely clear about your hopes for the future of your family, and how *both of you together* can make this happen in a way that nourishes, sustains and maintains healthy growth for your children as well as yourselves as individuals, partners and parents. Should your spouse refuse to cooperate with you, I suggest you pull in a culture-wise pastor or any other adult who has some influence with your spouse.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist. She lives in Langley, B.C.

## What Christian education means to Chantelle Zwart



My Christian education means a lot to me. To know that God is the foundation of my learning and that his word is at the core of my education brings me great comfort. What I like about my Christian education is that it will not only help me to reach my potential mentally and physically, but also spiritually.

To improve in something you need practice, and with a Christian education I am encouraged by my teachers not only to practice and work at my school work but to also practise my faith. I don't want to just learn things in a neutral context; I want to be taught on a basis of Christian values and beliefs.

To me the primary basis for Christian education should be the Bible itself. Christian schools teach students to understand and live all of life with an eternal perspective, while maintaining a daily, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. I know that my Christian education is essential in my life. Proverbs 22:6 reminds me of this: "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn away from it." So years from now when the strong winds of life blow in, that strong foundation, together with a positive influence, will combine to help keep me from falling, and, in the end, to stand.



## Reviews

## Recovering the pleasure of reading



"Great books are great in part because of what they ask of their readers: they are not readily encountered, easily assessed" (23).

Jacobs is particularly interested in young people, whose age group has been dubbed "The Dumbest Generation" because "their addiction to multiple simultaneous stimuli renders them incapable of the seriously focused and single-minded attention that the reading of big thick books requires" (6). Though these youth and older people know how to read, they constantly find their minds drifting from the text. One reader summed it up this way when he recalled how, as a child, he could focus on a book: "I miss my old brain" (7).

Jacobs' book is an attempt to say to readers, "Yes, you can! You can continue to develop as a reader even if you are struggling now."

One reason people find reading difficult, according to Jacobs, is that they have forgotten that the first reason we should read is because "reading books can be intensely pleasurable" (10). This is news to many North Americans who have been raised on the "self-help, self-improvement model of reading" which is "deeply embedded in American cultural life" (11). It is the equivalent of eating vegetables you detest because you know they are good for you. You eat them, though you loathe their intrusion on the pleasure of the rest of your meal.

**Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

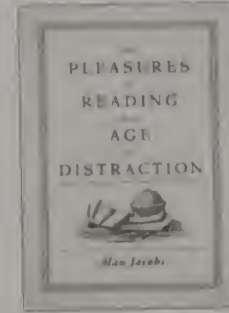
Alan Jacobs, professor of English at Wheaton College in Illinois, is convinced that, "despite the lamentations of many contemporary Jeremiahs, the cause of reading is not a lost one by any means" (5).

As Jacobs talked with and heard from many readers, he realized that "for all their enthusiasm they often lack confidence: they wonder whether they are reading well, with focus and attentiveness, with discretion and discernment" (6).

Though members of different generations feel this way,

Jacobs adheres to a radically different approach to reading. He is committed "to one dominant, overarching, nearly definitive principle for reading: *Read at Whim*" (15). What does Jacobs mean by this? Namely this, "Read what gives you delight – at least most of the time – and do so without shame" (23).

Though Jacobs encourages people to read at whim, he admits that this might not give a complete picture of the message he is trying to communicate. Still, it remains the foundation – "It should be normal for us to read what we want to read, to read what we truly enjoy reading" (33). But there is more to the life of a well-rounded reader. Other books than the ones we naturally prefer can enhance our lives and bring us joy and pleasure. Thus, Jacobs makes a distinction between what he calls *whim* and *Whim*. He explains, "In its lower-case version, whim is thoughtless, directionless preference that almost invariably leads to boredom or frustration or both. But Whim is something very different: it can guide us because it is based in self-knowledge" (41). When we know ourselves – our need to read, not only to become educated, but to feed our souls and to delight in words, sentences, plot, poetry and the vastness of human emotions and experiences – we will choose books that challenge us, that stimulate us and that force us to persevere through difficult passages because we know that attaining pleasure in reading does require effort at times.



### *The Pleasures of Reading in an Age of Distraction*

by Alan Jacobs. Oxford University Press, 2011

Having established his theme – *Read at Whim* – Jacob discusses other topics related to reading. He encourages his readers to read more slowly and thoughtfully with a writing instrument in hand in order to make comments in the margins or on note paper. He suggests ways for readers to work on their reading habits so they can persevere through challenging books and find pleasure in them. He spells out how technology has both negatively and positively affected reading. He defines the need to build an atmosphere of silence in order to read well. And he explores the qualities of a good book group.

Read Jacobs' book to learn about the joys of reading in this day and age. If his book doesn't interest you, then *Read at Whim*, as he strongly suggests. Find a book that gives you pleasure and enjoy the marvelous gift of reading that God has blessed us with.

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## What to do with an erotic love poem?

**Steve Harris**

In this new volume from the Brazos Theological Commentary series, Duke theologian Paul Griffiths takes on one of the most difficult books in Scripture. The *Song of Songs* is a hard book to interpret for a few reasons. There are multiple voices in the Song, but just who they are, and where they start and stop, is often ambiguous. Moreover, the Song is an erotic love poem, which can make it seem out of place amid other biblical books. Finally, the Song, like the book of Esther, fails to mention God. These difficulties have placed the Song among the most commented upon books in the last 2,000 years. Griffiths makes an admirable contribution to this long tradition.

In the preface, Griffiths makes an important distinction between "figural" and "allegorical" readings. In "allegorical" reading, one dispenses with the literal surface of the text for the sake of what is allegorized. In "figural" reading, however, while one person or thing can "figure" another, its own integral reality remains. Thus, Eve's Yes to the tempter "figures," negatively, Mary's Yes to the angel's message. But "Eve remains Eve, the lovers of the Song remain the lovers of the Song" (lvii). Reformed readers familiar with discussions of Old Testament "types" will appreciate Griffiths' care here. His reading of the Song is closely attentive to the literal surface of a song between two lovers, while still seeing in the text further – if not superior – layers of meaning.

Thus, in addition to reading the Song as one between a lover and beloved, Griffiths also reads the Song as between Christ and Israel/the Church, God and Mary and God and the individual. His efforts here draw out fascinating – though never fanciful – comments on, for example, God's adornment of his Church or the Lord's desire for our reciprocated gestures of love. The depth of these layers is endless because "scripture is not exhaustible: the hearer must return to it again and again in order to get from it all the nourishment it can provide by chewing it over with the teeth of the mind" (97). Because this is *God's Word*, it can "figure" realities in ways that merely human texts cannot.

The reader should be made aware that Griffiths is a Roman Catholic author, and vigorously so. He takes Song 4:7 ("O my beloved...there is no stain in you") as an opportunity to talk about the dogma of Mary's immaculate conception. The imagery of the (Roman Catholic) celebration of the Eucharist appears throughout. And most curiously, Griffiths chooses to comment not on the Hebrew text, but on the Latin New Vulgate translation. Nevertheless there is much to celebrate, from a Reformed point of view, in

Griffiths' exposition of the Song.

Griffiths, for example, pays quite close attention to the descriptions of the body in the Song. Though "gnostic haters of the body that most of us are" (53), the Song fights back against this inclination. More so than perhaps any other biblical book, the Song teaches us that we are "constitutively and essentially physical beings" (40) and that our bodies matter for our relations to one another, to the world and to God. The Song is not about our soul's ascent to God, but our full-bodied love of him and others. Further, Griffiths sounds strongly Augustinian notes of grace throughout. "No one," he writes, "not you and not me and not the church, is a beloved or has a beloved's beauty and desirability until loved" (154). Again, beauty is "a gift word" (43). As Luther wrote in his Heidelberg Disputation, "The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it" (§28). God makes silver earrings for us, silver-chased (Song 1:11); he adorns us with the beauty of grace.



### *Song of Songs*

Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible

by Paul J. Griffiths. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011.

The Song of Songs is unusual. As Griffiths remarks, "This text wants to seduce you" (lvi). The Song wants to have you, because God, who speaks in and through it, desires your own love. In the process of reading and rereading the Song, we are drawn into God's love and have our own human loves transfigured and reformed. "There is a complex verbal caress," he writes, "with which the Lord delights and instructs his people, a kiss that he places upon his people's lips" (xxvii), the kiss and caress of Scripture. Griffiths' own delightful writing admirably draws us into the kiss of the Song, the Song which sings of the great love of God for us, a love stronger than death (Song 8:6).

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*The Song of Songs has proven one of the most difficult Biblical books to interpret.*





## Reviews

## Rewired by technology: an inquiry into technology's changes

Tom Deelstra

Think of the many ways in which technology has impacted your life. Have you thought about the way in which technology has rewired your brain? Or what about the ways in which technology has impacted your faith? I know I haven't given these questions much thought, but Shane Hipps certainly has.

As an advertising account planner for Porsche, Hipps' job, in his words, was to "save people from feeling impotent, unattractive, or powerless, by offering them a Porsche, which promised to fix those problems" (5). If you've bought a Porsche, you can send him your thanks.

Eventually, selling this counterfeit gospel became too much for Hipps, so he gave up his job and entered seminary. While his financial future took a hit, his soul became much better for it.

Shane Hipps wrote *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* to examine the role between technology, our brains and our faith, doing so through the lens of his pastoral education. What follows is a lively, interesting and debatable read.

Hipps' journey from the advertising world to seminary was guided by the writings of Marshall McLuhan. In McLuhan's book, *Understanding Media*, the author contends that media tools are never neutral, asserting that, "the medium is the message." This statement had a powerful influence on Hipps, and he uses the phrase to analyze the effects of media and technology shifts on society, arguing that the invention of the printing press and later the advent of image culture and the Internet have had a profound impact on how we think.

Humans were created to live in community. Before the printing press, humans were not defined by their individuality, but by their communities. Tribal bonds were significant, and wisdom was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Religion was also a communal endeavour, with story being the primary means of communicating the gospel. Evidence of this is seen even in the stained glass of European cathedrals, which depict iconic stories rather than Pauline doctrine.

The printing press changed everything. This new technology created a legion of left-brained, analytical thinkers. While the gospel was made available to all, its message was drastically reduced to the simplistic formula, "apologize for sins + believe in Jesus = go to heaven" (29). Hipps argues that the technology of printing and writing erodes the communal nature of faith and weakens tribal bonds. The printing press moves our experiences of faith from something that is personal to something private; the church becomes a "collection of discrete individuals all working on their personal relationship with Christ" (40).

Image culture, which began with the photograph, introduced a new shift in thought. Images make you feel rather than think, they don't argue, they give you an experience. While words stimulate the brain and require imagination, images dull the senses by captivating the imagination. This is the reason, Hipps argues, that a book is always better than its film adaptation. In terms of faith, practical theology, theology informed by practice, becomes more important than the doctrine that emerged in the print era.

Later technologies continued to shape ways of thinking and approaches to faith. Media like the Internet provide information "torn from its local and historical setting... presented as a mosaic of unrelated headlines with no obvious connection to one another" (50). Information has become a commodity to itself, something to be collected, bought and sold. The consequence to our faith is that with so many competing messages, or truths, people no longer feel need for absolute Truth.

The Internet has also destroyed social bonds by creating a virtual community that is "infinitely more virtual than it is communal" (55). Not only is it more virtual, but the online world has also spoiled our appetite for authentic community. The erosion of authentic community has dangerous implications for the church, an institution dependent on the fellowship of its believers.

These are just some of the ways in which we are affected by technology. Hipps has many other examples, and his hope is that *Flickering Pixels* will raise awareness as to the effects of media influence; "Our lack of awareness is what empowers the media to bully us" (75).

Hipps also hopes to awaken the church. Taking "the medium is the message" analogy and applying it to faith, Hipps argues that in the same way that Jesus came embodying a new message, so also the church today must bring forward a new message; "our methods and message must both evolve" (77). Furthermore, he contends, "When we claim the gospel message is unchanging, we risk boasting a kind of omniscience in which we presume to know the totality of God's mysteries and intentions" (79). For Hipps, the church is God's new medium and message; its believers called to live in authentic community, bringing healing and hope to the world.

*Flickering Pixels* is a challenging read. Hipps' summary of media technology and its effects on humans is both thought provoking and alarming. More startling is his belief that the gospel message is evolving. This line of thinking leaves the believer standing in dangerous sinking sand. Rather than changing the gospel, Christians are called to stand firm on the assurance that there is one unchanging Jesus and gospel message. While the gospel can be shared in many new and exciting ways, it remains the same life-giving message that Christ commanded his followers to share with the nations. *Flickering Pixels* is a potentially great book riddled with theology that is hazardous to the believer's spiritual health.

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Winston Churchill famously said, "We shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us." How have the technologies we have formed in turn formed us?

## Love and the Classroom: Shifts in understanding worldview and the project of Christian Education

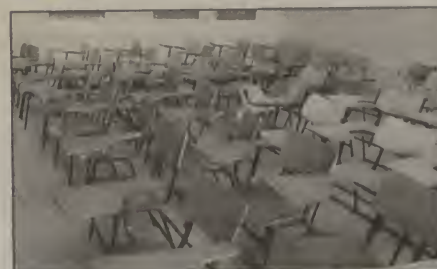
Nick Schuurman

"This is going to be the only thing you are going to remember from this evening," he warned the university-aged crowd who had gathered to hear him speak. "Picture a bobble-head, you know, the little figurines with the exaggerated heads that sit on dashboards?" He had us fixed. These were the kind of words we understood, a relief from the difficult language of philosophy that dominated the lecture up until that point. "That is the picture of how we have been thinking about education and about worship, and that is what we have to move away from."

That simple illustration captured what lay at the heart of his lecture, and at the heart of Calvin College Professor James K.A. Smith's recent project, *Desiring the Kingdom*. This book is dense, heavy stuff. If the bobble-head is a more manageable image, stick with that, and consider, if you will, the following abbreviation of his message:

In question is an overhaul of the notion of worldview, in particular as it has been studied in the context of modern evangelical academic world. The modern, post-Enlightenment picture of humanity, the author posits, was too top-heavy (we were essentially disembodied brains walking around) and suggested that we were at our core intellectual, or cognitive creatures. Smith argues that we are in fact, fundamentally, and above all else, lovers (Smith proposes the term *homo liturgicus* as an apt replacement for Descartes's infamous axiom, *cogito ergo sum*). By love, he means something more than my love of tea, or even the love shared in the context of marriage, but rather our most fundamental desires which lie at the core of our being. And the nature of our love is unstoppable (the faucet, so to speak, cannot be turned off) and always directed towards an end; we cannot change the fact that we are lovers, but what does change is the direction at which our love is aimed. Smith calls this the "teleological nature of love." Practices and rituals form our habits, which are the second-nature sort of fulcrums of our heart,

directing our love. Because we are fundamentally lovers, and our love must be directed at an end, it makes sense that there are a myriad of cultural institutions, which though not implicitly religious in the way we usually think of them, are religious in that they command our allegiance and vie for our passions.



Is our understanding of education too top-heavy?

Smith, having previously written extensively on the interaction between postmodernism and the Christian faith, is questioning the modern assumptions of post-enlightenment anthropology. If you have ever sat through a lecture on worldview, you will probably recall that, up until recently, the working definition went something like this: "a comprehensive framework of one's basic assumptions about life." Smith's suggestion that this understanding of what it means to be human is too cerebral has, as result, created a bit of a stir in the world of evangelical academics.

The implication – and this is what Smith admits is his goal – is going to mean a renewal in the areas of education and congregational worship. If we are primarily liturgical, or desiring creatures, the post-secondary agenda ought to be more concerned with formation than information. And as a product of both the North American education system and the protestant tradition, I find a great deal of resonance in his thesis. What and how we love, more than what we

think about the world, shapes who we are and how we ultimately view and interact with the world.

*Desiring the Kingdom* is a daunting, yet rewarding read. It is going to challenge our notions of worldview, and how we think about education, Christian or otherwise. For the Reformed reader in the tradition of Calvin and Kuyper, this will likely find a place alongside Wolter's *Creation Regained* and Plantinga's *Engaging God's World* as a definitive text on worldview studies. For anyone who desires to seriously wrestle with some of the most basic assumptions about what it means to be human, this will be a stimulating and provocative book.

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Schuurman is CC's reviews editor.



*Desiring the Kingdom*  
by James K.A. Smith.  
Grand Rapids, Mich.:  
Baker Academic, 2009.



*Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*  
by Shane Hipps.  
Grand Rapids, Mich.:  
Zondervan, 2009.





## Classifieds

## Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch



(For this month's theme issue on education, I devote my column to celebrating the continuing work and influence of a former Christian school teacher and life-long learner.)

*Sin, an alien invasion, has distorted our view of creation and how to take care of it.*

*Sin has broken the harmony between man and creation.*

*As Christians it is our mandate to give new hope to the world by being faithful to God's law of creation which he established (Psalm 33:9).*

*One way of doing this is to clearly understand the nature and extent of the environmental problems.*

John Franken of Smithers, B.C., is the man who penned these words. John, a retired school teacher, has devoted more than 25 years to understanding one creature made by God: the mountain bluebird.

When he moved to the Smithers area in the 1980s, Franken built a bluebird "trail" (pairs of nesting boxes throughout his local

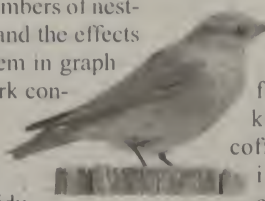
## Mr. Bluebird

area) and carefully logged numbers of nesting pairs, fledging numbers and the effects of predation. He then put them in graph form on his website. The work continues today.

Public awareness of bluebirds led other people to build nesting boxes as individuals, schools and naturalist organizations. Local mountain bluebird populations have moved from being a relative rarity in 1986 to being a common bird in 2011. It is probable that the nest boxes are partly responsible as replacements for natural nesting cavities which were removed as land was cleared and competitors such as house sparrows thrived near farms and towns.

Franken has encouraged large numbers of his students to identify, study and be awestruck by local bird species, including mountain bluebirds. He has helped area residents learn how to make nesting boxes. And he is presently planning on helping an area farmer establish his own bluebird trail.

Franken's work continues into his semi-retirement. He and his wife Sandi run a bed



and breakfast operation that they call Chickadee Acres.

Visitors to the operation speak favourably about sitting in the kitchen or on the deck, drinking coffee or a little wine and watching chickadees, pine siskins, evening grosbeaks, red-breasted nuthatches, grey jays and downy and hairy woodpeckers. At the Franken home, the natural world is part of daily existence. "This Is My Father's World" is a lifestyle, not just a song, to the Franken family, and visitors seem to be getting the message.

## Inspiring earthkeepers

As a person who can easily get discouraged by the callous disregard that many of the powers, authorities, and principalities show God's handiwork by digging it up, paving it over, and using it as a disposal area for human refuse, I am delighted to encounter people like John Franken.

Sometimes professed Christians act as if Christ's return signifies "no value" to the creation. But as Franken, who bases much

of his life's work on the Holy Scriptures, forthrightly states: "We are the stewards, the caretakers, of this parcel of land [which we "own"] whether it be a city lot or a quarter section. The land does not belong to us because we have title to it but belongs to God as does the entire creation."

I am glad to be able to point out to readers of this column that there are bright lights within the Christian community. From the days of John Muir to Calvin de Witt, from Harlan Kredit of Lynden, Wash. to John Franken of Smithers, B.C., God has provided earthkeepers to teach and inspire us.

The mountain bluebirds are almost all flocked up now, and most of them have left for their winter homes. We are always a little sad when the bluebirds migrate, but the chickadees remain on Franken's acres and ours, small parts of our Father's world.

You can find out more about Chickadee Acres and the Franken's bluebird project at [chickadeeacres.com](http://chickadeeacres.com).

*Curt Gesch is a retired teacher who has a root cellar, a garden chalet, and a really old house in Quick, B.C.*

## Patchwork Words

Melissa Kuipers



It was the type of situation we wish happened more often in our churches. While I was volunteering one Saturday, a teenage girl who had never attended our church before wandered in

looking for advice. "I just got in a big fight with my mom, and thought I might be able to talk to someone here," she told my friend and I. "See, my boyfriend and I have been together five months and we really love each other. Well, my mom just found my birth control pills and is furious with me. At first I lied and told her I was on the pill for other medical reasons, but she didn't believe me and I know I need to tell her the truth. I was just wondering if you could give me some advice or pray with me that my mom will be able to understand that the fact that I'm sexually active won't ruin our relationship."

My friend, who has teenage children of his own, and I both felt for all parties involved in the situation. We empathized with how difficult it would be for a mother to find out that her daughter isn't living by the standards she had hoped for her. We felt for the daughter who feared she might ruin her relationship with her mother because of a lifestyle choice, one she felt she was ready for and was being careful about. My guess is that, while this teenager's mother might have been extremely disappointed, she would rather her daughter be honest than for her to hide aspects of her lifestyle in order to avoid conflict.

## Discussing sex with teens

## A forbidden topic

Unfortunately, many teens feel that sex is a topic they can't raise with their parents. Mark Regnerus, in his book *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*, describes a revealing Canadian study: "In a fascinating set of in-depth interviews with Canadian youth . . . all interviewees 'recalled a lack of free dialogue around the issue of sex . . . and described experiencing a sense of shame when they attempted to talk with adults about [it] . . . They had learned at an early age to remain silent about, keep secret, or never to directly describe their own sexual experiences.'" Regnerus continues to say that "interviewees related experiences where 'adults had closed-off dialogue about sex by using authoritative tactics ('You better not be having sex at your age!'), extremely vague and indirect messaging, and/or highly clinical and instructive approaches,' perceived to be ways of avoiding the more complex emotional and pleasurable aspects of sex. . . . Some topics, the youth felt, were simply intentionally off-limits with their parents." This is a big problem; parents need to be having open and honest conversations with their children about sex.

## Creating openness and honesty

Regnerus acknowledges that some religious parents fear that discussing sex (particularly birth control and contraceptives) might lead their children to think about sex prematurely or encourage them to be sexu-

ally active. However, simply put, teens are thinking about sex, and, statistically speaking, they are doing most of their learning about sex online or from friends. Regnerus goes on to explain that "conversations about sex can be uncomfortable for both parent and child, but not having them – or handling them poorly – can cause long-term damage. Multiple studies confirm that adolescents who have no communication with their parents about sex tend to evaluate such silence negatively, both in the short run and later as adults."

While the number of Christian teenagers engaged in sexual activity is a little lower than that of non-Christians, it's still a reality that many Christian young people are having premarital sex. In fact, evangelical teenagers are more likely to engage in risky sexual activity (i.e., without protection and/or birth control) than other teenagers. If all teens are getting is a vague impression that sexuality is considered wrong by their churches or if it is treated as a mysterious mind-blowing activity that is arbitrarily off-limits, they will often compartmentalize their faith experience and have no means of applying it to their social encounters.

## Open and ongoing communication

Teenagers need on-going and open communication with their role models. While parents and leaders want to create strict boundaries to protect their youth from the risks of sexual activity, teens want a conversational space to express their own opinions



*When parents use authoritative tactics to teach about sex, teens are likely to tune out.*

and voice their questions without fear of being judged. If teenagers feel they can't ask why they should wait, they'll often jump to their own conclusions based on what they are learning from their peers or the media.

Be willing to ask your teen what he or she considers appropriate behaviour or physical affection while dating, and be specific with what kinds of physical expressions you consider appropriate, what kinds of activities of okay, and the benefits of taking a relationship slowly. For a lot of teens today, oral sex and other sexual expressions are not considered sex. Using vague statements or making assumptions that your child shares your interpretation of sexual activity can be unproductive. More importantly, however, it is necessary to be specific about the emotional and relational aspects of physical intimacy, to be honest about the pleasure and beauty of sex, without elevating it to a disproportionate definition of human experience – which both secular culture and evangelical subculture often do.

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## Columns

## Our World Today

Bert Hielema



## Preparing students for the new creation

Tomorrow will not be like yesterday. Today is already different, but tomorrow, the second decade of the new century, will be like no other. Here's one reason: this week we "celebrate" the arrival of earth-inhabitant number seven billion.

When I was born in 1928 the world had two billion people, basically all of whom were environmentally friendly. My maternal grandfather farmed with a horse, 20 cows, a few pigs and a flock of free running chickens. My paternal grandfather, a grocer, came calling once a week with his horse-drawn two-wheeled cart to barter coffee, tea or sugar for eggs. In those days self-sufficiency was primary for most. That's no longer true.

Tomorrow's generation is basically oil-dependent, but faces a world where everything is past-peak: past oil-peak, past food-peak, past money-peak. That means people in school today will face a world with negative growth in addition to horrific hurricanes, dire drought, terrible typhoons, horrendous heat and destructive downpours, at least according to Bill McKibben.

In his book *Eaarth* McKibben writes: "We have waited too long to stop the advance of global warming, and massive change is not only unavoidable but already on the way. Our old familiar globe is suddenly melting, drying, acidifying, flooding and burning in ways no human has ever seen. We have created, in very short order, a new planet, still recognizable, but fundamentally different. We may as well call it Eaarth."

McKibben shows that we can no

longer rely on the false promise of endless growth; our hope depends on building the kind of society and economy that can concentrate on essentials, and create communities that will be able to withstand the pains of a planet perilously out of balance.

More than ever, Christian teaching should be based on article one of the Belgic Confession, which answers the question, "how we know God?" with: "First by the creation, preservation and government of the universe, since that universe is like a most elegant book, in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God, his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20: all these things are enough to convict men and leave them without excuse."

## Caring for creation

Getting to know creation, things visible and invisible as outlined in Colossians 1:15-20, and perceiving the current forces endangering it are the foremost tasks of Christian ministries. An institution is truly Christian when the result is a lifestyle that can seamlessly be continued in the New Creation, the arrival of a renewed and purified earth. This is the kind of thinking and living we need to teach in Christian schools.

Christians confess that God created the earth "in his name." That makes the earth holy. God has given his holy creation to us not as caretakers, not as stewards, but as owners. Psalm 115:16 says: "The highest heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to humankind."

This gift is irrevocable. God will

not renege on his generous donation. We are one with the earth, and our world today is our world forever. Any "heaven" teaching detracts from the real purpose of Christianity.

Here is something to ponder. In Genesis 2:15 the Lord put Adam and Eve – that is you and me – in the garden "to work it and take care of it." When Joshua, who succeeded Moses as Israel's leader, gave his farewell address to his nation, he pledged that "he and his household will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). I have been told by good authority that Joshua used the same verb of "serving the Lord" that God used to ask humanity "to take care of creation," indicating that to work and take care of the

garden of the earth and serving the Lord are one and the same thing.

Now, more than ever before in history, God wants to prepare us for "the new creation to come." The word Education comes from the Latin verb *educere*, which means to draw out and to bring up. But too often we leave students in the old way of doing things. We teach them that growth and prosperity will be endless.

To lead students toward an outdated situation, a state belonging to a prior generation, is a waste of brain-power and money, and will only cause them to become disillusioned. One of the 10 commandments is "You shall not give false testimony." We do this daily because our polluting oil-based

way of life is a distortion of the Truth.

A teacher once told me that to confront students with such a radical picture will only make them depressed. However, the truth is never depressing: it will set us free. That is what Christianity-church-school-family-society- is all about: to set us free, and to face the future with an eye on Jesus, who will guide us no matter what.

*Bert Hielema lives amidst forests and fields, in Eastern Ontario, and can be reached at [bert@hielema.ca](mailto:bert@hielema.ca).*

## Words from Wild Horses

Kennedy Warkentin



## Private school



"We are letting you know that in your own best interest this year, we have enrolled you in a private Christian school!"

Those words, which may not have been exactly as stated above, were spoken to me at the age of 17 and just before I entered into grade 12. For some young people this would have sent them off into a tail spin of anxiety, anger and maybe heartbreak, especially in their last year of high school. To me, it was music to my ears.

From grades 7-11, my days consisted of great fear walking to school, attending school and walking home because I was bullied. Every day I was ridiculed for being different, called a sissy, faggot, fairy ... and names and gestures that no teenager should hear or see. I was pushed around as I walked the halls, and many times ran home so that I wouldn't be taunted even more.

I hated school. I dreaded it and could hardly wait for it to just be over. I had a few good memories of times when I was affirmed by teachers and excelled in music and the arts, but public school was a harsh place for a teen labeled different.

Part of the reasoning behind my mother telling me I'd be going to private school was the fact that her relationship with my dad at the time was very rocky and she thought it would be in my best interest to go and attend private school and to stay in residence. My mother had also attended this school and so the fact that I was eager to go was an answer to her prayer, and an indication that I would take this well. I was fearful to some degree, but it was also a fresh start for me. No one knew me, so I could actually attend the school with the potential that I wouldn't be bullied.

As we prepped, bought the uniforms and supplies, I began to anticipate what the year would look like, my final year in high school.

Reality hit when my parents dropped me off. This was really it. I began to see that this was a very good thing. I began to make friends. It was challenging at times, but I found a place to be me. I explored doing things that I would never have done in my previous school. I tried out for the Chamber Choir and was accepted. I tried out for the school musical and was accepted. I found that I was pretty good at singing. I stepped out to be on the fine arts committee, and again I was accepted and welcomed. I was able to freely create and be who God had desired for me! I even stepped past my comfort zone and participated in some sporting events. This was a haven. When my parents separated at the Christmas break and I returned to school after the holidays, the Dean of students came up to me and shared that they were told of my parents' separation and if there was anything I needed I shouldn't hesitate to ask. They volunteered to walk with me and give me some very caring counsel. I felt cared for and this place became in many ways my refuge.

I graduated with a group of students who got to know me and welcomed me into their midst. I am forever grateful. Some kids are forced to go to private school, maybe because they are getting into trouble. And private school might not be for everyone. But for me, even though I went because my parents thought it would be good for me to be away from their relational mess, it served a purpose: it was my sanctuary and I met Christ in that place. It allowed me to have at least one good experience in high school. I thank God for being able to go to private school and having had that opportunity.



*Kennedy Warkentin ([kennyp66@gmail.com](mailto:kennyp66@gmail.com)) works full time as an urban missionary with Living Waters Canada and is an artist and musician. He lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter.*



Children need to be taught to care for the earth.



## Classifieds

Birthday	Anniversary	Obituary
<p><b>Okke Bouma</b> (Peace Tower 503 - 45 Kingknoll Drive Brampton ON L6Y 5P2)</p> <p>will celebrate his <b>80th Birthday</b> on Nov. 13.</p> <p>His wife Nita, their 4 children &amp; spouses, 13 grandchildren (3 spouses) and 5 great-grandchildren are thankful to God for His continued blessing and faithfulness.</p> <p>To God be the Glory.</p>	<p>1951 - October 29 - 2011</p> <p>Giving thanks to the Lord for his goodness and blessings through the years, we announce the <b>60th Wedding Anniversary</b> of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.</p> <p><b>DIRK AND DIEN VAN KAMPEN (Linker)</b></p> <p><i>Great is your faithfulness, O God our Father</i></p> <p>With our love, Janet and John Schinkel Chris, Jennifer, Liz and Jason (Leah) and Amanda John and Jacqueline Van Kampen Jessica and Dave (Evan), Jason, Jeremy and Kaitlyn Anita and Dean Hinchcliffe Derek and Lindsay</p> <p>Mailing Address: Apt 115 - 400 Dominion St. Strathroy ON N7G 3G8</p>	<p><b>HARMKE "Hammy" De VRIES</b></p> <p>Oosterzee, Friesland Whitby, Ontario March 28, 1928 - September 22, 2011</p>  <p>Called Home to be with her Lord &amp; Saviour</p> <p>Beloved wife of Andy De Vries for 59 years</p> <p>Dear mother of Anne &amp; Michael Godfrey, Tracy &amp; David Vernest, Rose &amp; Harvey Lootsma; Lloyd &amp; Rose De Vries and Rob De Vries.</p> <p>Loving Grandma of Devan, Cameron (Tara), Kyle, Mark (Dian), Heather (Josh), Nicole, Brandon, Curtis, Brett, Luke &amp; Hanna.</p> <p>Cherished great-grandma of Easton, Ainsley &amp; Clare</p> <p>Dear sister of Norman (predeceased) (Grace), Ben (Wemke), Clarence, Jake, Bob (Evelyn) and 4 sisters in Holland</p> <p>Correspondence: Andy De Vries, 608 - 100 Glen Hill Dr S Whitby ON L1N 8R4</p>
<p><b>Dutch Service</b> will be held November 13 at 3 pm. in the <b>Ancaster</b> Christian Reformed Church Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. DVDs available.</p> 	<p><b>THANK YOU-THANK YOU</b> <b>NETHERLANDS BAZAAR RAISES \$120,000.00!!</b></p> <p>The Committee "Netherlands Bazaar" would like to take this opportunity to thank all contributors, volunteers and supporters of the 2011 Netherlands Bazaar.</p> <p>Thank you to all those who have created beautiful crafts since our last bazaar. Community spirit is what makes the Netherlands Bazaar such a special event every two years.. It is an opportunity to work together for a great cause - namely to help people significantly less fortunate than ourselves.</p> <p>If you know of a family of Dutch heritage in Ontario in real need, we would like to hear from you before November 10, in order that we may surprise them with a food parcel this holiday season.</p> <p>Please note that our registered charitable standing was granted on the condition that all recipient families are of Dutch heritage. For each recipient a questionnaire has to be completed and signed by the contact person.</p> <p>Please forward all requests to the following address by November 10, and we will forward a questionnaire to you to be completed:</p> <p>Mrs. G. Spaans, Committee Netherlands Bazaar, 15 Pavillion St., Unionville ON L3R 1N8.</p> <p>The following committee members may also be notified by phone: Gé Spaans (905) 477-1243, Jannie Thomas (416) 498-8706, Dia Pos (905-854-5102), Henny deCloe (416-222-1677) or Nellie Kamerman (905-884-6939)</p> <p>We thank you from the bottom of our hearts because</p> <p>it is thanks to you that we have been able to raise, despite these tough economic times, the overwhelming amount of \$120,000.00. For the Committee,</p> <p>Gé Spaans Email: <a href="mailto:committee@netherlandsbazaar.com">committee@netherlandsbazaar.com</a> Website: <a href="http://www.netherlandsbazaar.com">www.netherlandsbazaar.com</a></p> <p><b>Event - Shared concert for Room 2 Grow pregnancy care centre in Clinton by Ambassadors and Men of Note.</b> Nov. 5, 7:30 pm Free will offering (receipts for cheques) Info 519 887 8610.</p>	

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### Principal

under the COO Principal's model. The successful candidate will be the educational team leader and be able to affirm, motivate and challenge staff members; the principal will be an effective communicator and an integral part of board management in order to fulfil the mission and vision of the school. The successful candidate will hold an Ontario Principal's Certificate and an Ontario Teaching Certificate. A Christian School Principal's Certificate and/or a Christian School Teaching Certificate would be a definite asset. This position is based on 50% administration time and 50% teaching time. This is a definite, full time position with benefits. The City of Orillia can be found nestled in the heart of Ontario's Lake Country. We are very fortunate to be located on the shores of two beautiful and plentiful natural resources, Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching. We are approximately 129 km north of Toronto.

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The deadline for application is Friday November 25, 2011.

#### Contact Information:

Christa Nancekievill, Board Chair  
[dnance@sympatico.ca](mailto:dnance@sympatico.ca)

371 Grenville Ave., Orillia, ON L3V 7P5



### Principal/COO

### Thunder Bay Christian School

Thunder Bay Christian School, situated in scenic North-western Ontario, is seeking applications for a full-time Principal. The City of Thunder Bay, with a population of over 122,000 people, is located on the north shore of Lake Superior and surrounded by the beauty of mountains, lakes, and forests which allow for a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. Thunder Bay Christian School currently has 104 students from JK to Grade 10 and will be celebrating their 50th anniversary in the fall of 2012. Information about TBCS is available at [www.tbaychristianschool.ca](http://www.tbaychristianschool.ca).

The new Principal will be required to provide leadership and direction as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the school. This means that the ideal candidate must have strong leadership, communication, educational and organizational skills. He or she must be able to use these skills to successfully revitalize, evaluate, and encourage an experienced staff to work as a team with the unified purpose of instructing students to grow spiritually and academically. The successful candidate will have a sincere and active faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and be committed to a reformed Christian world view. Some classroom teaching will also be required. Preference will be given to candidates who hold or are progressing towards a Christian School Principal Certificate.

Interested applicants should forward a cover letter, resume, statement of faith and a statement of their philosophy of Christian education which includes their vision for Christian educational leadership. Please send this by e-mail to [agysen.tbcs@gmail.com](mailto:agysen.tbcs@gmail.com) or by mail to Angela Gysen, TBCS Principal Search Committee, R.R. #2, Site 12-36, Thunder Bay, ON, P7C 4V1.

The deadline for applications is January 9, 2012. Contract begins August 1, 2012.



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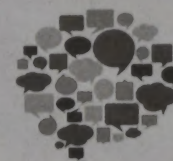
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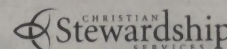
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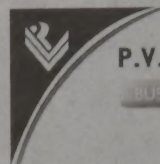
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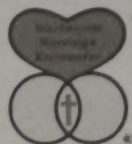
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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**Oct 19 & 22** Leendert Kooij and the Ontario Christian Music Assembly (OCMA) will host a Benefit Concert on Oct 19, 7:30 pm at the Hebron Christian Reformed Church, **Whitby** and Oct 22 7:30 pm at the St George's Anglican Church, **Guelph**.

**Nov 4** Christian Festival Concert. 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**. See ad.

**Nov 4-6** Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend. Peterborough, ON Register at [www.reformedme.org](http://www.reformedme.org)

**Nov 5** Shared concert for Room 2 Grow pregnancy care centre in **Clinton** by Ambassadors and Men of Note. 7:30pm, Free will offering (receipts for cheques) Info 519 887 8610.

**Nov 10** Annual Church & Charity Law Seminar. Hosted by Carters Professional Corporation in **Toronto**, Ontario. Details and online registration available at <http://charitylaw.ca>.

**Nov 13** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Ralph Koops will be preaching. DVDs available.

**Nov 18** The Bach Chorale Handel's Messiah 8 pm Christ Church Anglican, 4 Elizabeth Street North, **Brampton** \$30, Students \$10

**Nov 20** The Bach Chorale Handel's Messiah 8 pm St. James Anglican Church, **Caledon East**. Information is on our website [www.georgetownbachchorale.com](http://www.georgetownbachchorale.com)

**Nov 20** CRC of **Stratford**, Ontario 60 year celebration. More information to come or at [stratfordcrc.org](http://stratfordcrc.org)

**Nov 23** The Martin Mans Formation, Church of the Epiphany, 560 Dundas St., **Woodstock** 8 pm. Info & tickets at: [musicasacrachorus.com](http://musicasacrachorus.com)

**Nov 24** Musica Sacra Chorus & The Martin Mans Formation, Mountainview CRC, **Grimsby** 8 pm. Info & tickets at: [musicasacrachorus.com](http://musicasacrachorus.com)

**Nov 25** Sacred Harmonies from around the World. Knox Presbyterian Church, 58 Riddell St., **Woodstock**. Info & tickets at: [musicasacrachorus.com](http://musicasacrachorus.com)

**Nov 26** A Celebration of Choral Classics, The Sanderson Centre for the Arts, 88 Dalhousie St., **Brandford** 8 pm. Info & tickets at: [musicasacrachorus.com](http://musicasacrachorus.com)

**Dec 3** The Bach Chorale Handel's Messiah at 8 pm Old Town Hall, Willow and Bower Streets, **Acton**. Information is on our website [www.georgetownbachchorale.com](http://www.georgetownbachchorale.com)

**Dec 4** The Bach Chorale Handel's Messiah at 2:30 pm St. Elias Ukrainian Church, 10193 Heritage Rd, **Brampton**. Website [www.georgetownbachchorale.com](http://www.georgetownbachchorale.com)

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## Christian Festival Concert

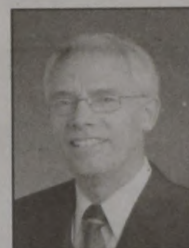
Friday, November 4, 2011 — 7:30 p.m.

Roy Thomson Hall, Toronto

Order tickets from:

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## Stratford Christian Reformed Church

Stratford Ontario Canada,

is planning to celebrate **60 years**  
of God's goodness and faithfulness.

All friends and former members are invited to attend a special service to commemorate this occasion with us

on **November 20, 2011** at 9:30.

[www.stratfordcrc.org](http://www.stratfordcrc.org)



## Advertising



### What Christian education means to Carson Gee

Having a Christian education means more to me than just going to a school that has the word Christian in it. Being a Christian is about loving the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind. When talking about love, it shouldn't just be toward the Lord but also toward other people. Having a Christian education can help us live our lives to treat people with love and respect and to be a light to those around us.

Being a student at London District Christian Secondary School is a wonderful experience, and it is awesome to see our theme at work. The theme of our school is to be transformed. Every day I come into the school and see students walking and talking, and I can tell that they are transformed children of God. Christian education can be passed on not only from schools or churches but through other Christians. We can help others to see that there is a God who loves us and who has plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give us a hope and a future. We can work toward a goal to transform other people and introduce them to a life full of love and hope.

One thing that is very heart warming is to see people anxious for something to believe in. It is our Christian duty to fill that emptiness and that longing with the truth that the Lord loves all and that it is for everyone. Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and it is not just for Christians but for all. God sent his son, not to condemn the world, but to save the world. As Christians, we need to do our part to help save the world and it starts now. When asked what Christian education means to me, the question should have been what it doesn't mean to me because Christian education means everything to me.



### What Christian education means to Eric Goforth

The past 13 years of my life I have been learning in the Christian education system. From Kindergarten to grade 8 I attended Stratford District Christian School, and for grades 9 through 12 I attended London District Christian Secondary School.

Thirteen years learning life skills that I am going to need to succeed as an individual living in society. All my life I have been taught Christian principles in the classroom and in family time at home. These principles – the way Jesus wants me to live my life – are all stored in my brain rubbing shoulders with the knowledge I have learned in school.

Some people may wonder how the knowledge learned in the classroom can mesh with the principles God has shown us through his word. People can wonder all they want, but they are never going to truly know or experience this full blessing until they learn in a Christian school environment.

I feel truly blessed to have had the opportunity to attend both Christian elementary and high school. Everything I have learned for thirteen years has developed my faith and given me a solid base that I feel comfortable standing on. All subjects, from science to English and history to math, are taught with a foundation that is rooted in the Bible.

Christian education has been very meaningful to my life and I thank my parents for giving of their time and money to make it possible for me to have a Christian education.

### Odds and Trends

The University of Houston recently added a new course to its recreation curriculum, in which students can earn credits toward their degree by playing the Nintendo Wii video game system. The course can be taken in place of more traditional physical education fare like soccer, basketball, tennis or weight-lifting, and requires students to log at least 20 minutes of playing time on the Wii twice a week. Before you laugh, consider the fact that a recent study by the American Council on Exercise showed that playing Wii sports burns more calories and results in an elevated heart rate when compared to doing nothing at all. Okay, now it's time to laugh.

But playing Wii for credit isn't the strangest university course out there. For instance, Queen's University Belfast offers

an open-learning course entitled: "Feel the Force: How to Train in the Jedi Way." While students don't actually get to use the force or wield lightsabers, they do learn about the psychology of thought, behaviour, emotion, and empathy – areas over which a Jedi knight is supposed to claim mastery. Course content may soon include anthropology and linguistics. A recent study by two linguists found that many dead languages used a subject-object-verb pattern rather than the subject-verb-object pattern used by most modern languages. What this means is that our ancestors actually talked like Yoda; the wise, green and shrivelled-looking Jedi master in the Star Wars films. Meditate on this, students will. At least if they want to pass.

Michael Buma



### What Christian education means to Lea Wassink

All my school years my parents have sent me to Christian schools. Over the years, that didn't mean much to me, but now in my final year of high school I realize that it has made so much of who I am today.

Without Christian education, not only would my faith not be where it is today, but I wouldn't see God in every part of my life as I do now. Christian education is the reason why I know what it means to carry God into all parts of your life, not just the spiritual, but the emotional, social, mental, and physical as well.

This past year I took my biology course by correspondence, instead of in class, through a non-Christian organization. This was the first time I had studied biology separate from all the other sciences, and I felt lost. I missed trying to understand God in his creation. I wanted to know how God had placed and formed his creation. God is not separate or apart from his creation. He is always working in it and should never be thought to be apart from it.

At my school, my faith is not something I have to set aside for the comfort of others. My teachers are open about their own faith, which is something that I really appreciate because my teachers are my role models. We openly discuss God and Christianity in our classrooms, which is not a freedom I often experience outside of the Christian community.

When I learn math, I see God infinite in his glory. When I study French, I see God as a diverse creator with a rich taste in culture. When I practice music, I see God as the Father who gave us the gift of self-expression. When I study the sciences, I see the immense detail God has lovingly put into the world around us.

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